



# **Hotel Guests' Participation on the Facebook Platform of International Hospitality Brands – Complaint Analysis and Customer Satisfaction**

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## **BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Social network sites triggered a new potential for the use of the Internet as a major communication channel nowadays, increasing consumers power of expression. Dependently on the quality of the service provided, the tourism industry is no exception and has been adapting to the new online content tools, with Facebook distancing itself as an important vehicle to enhance the relationship between hotels and their guests. The main purpose of this study is to examine Facebook as a complaint platform for hotel guests and measuring hotel guests' consequent satisfaction, by analyzing and characterizing the complaints made in three major hospitality brands and accessing the interaction and treatment received by hotel guests as a recovery from service failure. Its scientific contribution intends to address the lack of an empirical study on this subject, highlighting the growing importance of dealing and responding to online complaints. It will also provide a practical utility for hotels to better manage their Facebook sites, and to more efficiently tackle the exposed complaints and meet their guests' needs.

**Key-words:** social media, Facebook, hospitality, complaints, customer satisfaction

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In the past decade the Internet development embodied the emergence of Web 2.0 which completely changed users' online behavior and introduced new communication tools, such as the social media. By increasing the interaction between users through the exploration of its mass collaboration tools, the social media allow and encourage users to have a more active participation. (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004; Adebajo & Michaelides, 2010)

In the tourism industry, the need to provide constant information to many users, such as brand promotion, advertisement of promotions or special offers contributed to use the internet as a main communication channel, changing the way tourism information is distributed – and hospitality brands are no exception.

This evolution and transformation at the organization-customer relationship level made the hospitality industry to rethink their communication strategies in order to stay competitive in the market (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004). Nowadays hotel chains are no longer keeping their efforts into developing a static website, but instead are increasingly turning to the use of social media tools where social networks, as the Facebook, fall within. Thus, they use a two way communication tool to become closer with customers (hotel guests) and to better manage those relationships.

Despite this positive effect for the hospitality brands, social network tools also allow their users to more easily express their dissatisfaction towards a specific target. (Withiam, 2011). In this scenario, *“after the emergence of social media, suppliers could instantly offer an explanation and demonstrate how they are attempting to recover a service failure to dissatisfied customers if there is a problem on products, service, or operation.”* (Leung *et al.*, 2013, p.13; Huang *et al.*, 2010), meaning hotel chains have a crucial opportunity to perform a service recovery, i.e., recover value to the customer.

Having these concepts and reality as a starting point, the main aim is to conduct a study of the Facebook platform as a channel of hotel guests' complaints, by analyzing and characterizing the complaints and how they are handled by hospitality brands, and then, measuring hotel guests' consequent satisfaction. Using Facebook as an online tool in the marketing strategy of hotel chains, the interaction between hotel chains and their

respective hotel guests – with a higher focus on the side of hotel guests’ participation in such sites –, the content of the complaints and the post-complaint conduct are analyzed, in order to see if and how hotel chains were able to reverse a service failure into customer satisfaction – service recovery.

The research was done using three of the biggest international hospitality brands: *Marriott Hotels & Resorts*, *Hilton Hotels & Resorts* and *RIU Hotels and Resorts*.

In order to achieve the proposed goals the following research questions were defined:

- 1) How is the Facebook used by hotel guests in order to express their dissatisfaction with a service or product delivery?
- 2) How do organizations deal with the exposure of complaints through their Facebook pages?
- 3) What is the satisfaction level of hotel guests regarding the response given by the hotels management in relation to their complaint?

The relevance of the present study lacks the non-existence of an empirical study that analyzes the effect and impact of different online responses and service recovery strategies (and intrinsically customer satisfaction) in the tourism and hospitality industry through social media sites, despite scientific evidence of the importance of responding to customers’ complaints. Moreover, given the growing importance of social media in the online tourism domain, it is crucial to look into more detail on the mode of interaction between hotels and hotel guests, particularly through the most used social network site for this purpose – Facebook is the number one social network worldwide, with more than three quarters of internet users having a Facebook account (GlobalWebIndex, 2014). It is undeniable to recognize its importance these days and its connection with the tourism industry only reinforces social networks’ strength as a preponderant communication channel.

It is also of value for the hospitality brands analyzed to have an empirical study that demonstrates whether their current strategy towards their own social network sites is the most suitable to interact and enhance customer relationship, providing them accurate and valid data regarding tracking service failure and reverse it into a satisfactory service recovery for their guests.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1. Tourism Industry

It is difficult to find a precise definition of tourism, as no universal definition has been adopted to date. Barretto (2006) described tourism as a mix of relations and phenomena created by the movement of individuals and their stay in several destinations. There are, therefore, two different elements in tourism: travel is the dynamic element while the stay is the static element.

Aggregating the different aspects inherent to the tourism activity, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines tourism as a social, cultural and economic phenomenon, consisting in *“the activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited”* (UNWTO, 2001).

Tourism is one of the largest and fastest-growing economic sectors in the world, having had a continued expansion and diversification over the past six decades. As a result, today tourism has an economic and social significantly importance. According to the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), in 2014 Travel & Tourism's total contribution to world gross domestic product (GDP) was US\$ 7.6 trillion, corresponding to 9.8% of total world GDP. As one of the world's largest employer, the Travel & Tourism industry supported 277 million jobs in 2014, 9.4% of all employees. Regarding international tourist arrivals, the UNWTO reveals a total of 1.133 million arrivals worldwide in 2014, a significant increase from the 25 million arrivals in 1950. International tourism receipts earned by destinations worldwide reached US\$ 1.245 billion in 2014. As indicated by Table 1 and the researches made by both organizations, tourism has had an almost uninterrupted growth over the past decades.

**Table 1 - World Tourism Growth: 1950-2014**

<b>Years</b>	<b>International Tourist Arrivals (millions)</b>	<b>International Tourism Receipts (billions in US\$)</b>
1950	25	2.1
1980	278	105
1990	435	271
2000	674	495
2010	949	966
2014	1.133	1.245

Source: World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)

UNWTO long term forecast predicts international tourist arrivals worldwide to reach 1.4 billion by 2020 and 1.8 billion by the year 2030, while the WTTC expects Travel & Tourism to contribute to 10.5% of the world GDP and to represent 10.7% of world employment by 2025.

Considered as a service and not as a tangible good (Reisinger *et al.*, 2001), the tourism product is then characterized by an employer-consumer relationship and it is embedded in an open system than not only interacts, but also influences and is influenced by the society segment in which it occurs (Schneider, 1973). The buying decision process is categorized depending on the degree of involvement on the part of the consumer (Lamb *et al.*, 2008) and as a high-involvement and high-risk product, in most cases the decision-making during the purchase of a tourism product is extensive, as opposed to a routine or limited one (Seaton & Bennett, 1996). It is important to acknowledge the importance of consumers' decision-making process and understand their search behaviors in order for companies to develop successful marketing strategies. Effective communication campaigns tailored to meet consumers' needs can be an important tool to influence their decision making process (Gursoy *et al.*, 2011; Jang, 2005).

The advent of the Internet in the 1990s and the fast development of information and communication technologies had a major impact in the tourism industry (Buhalis, 2003; O'Connor, 1999), specially due to the fact that it is an information-rich industry (Zhou,

2004). As one of the most important sectors that make use of Internet technology (Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2009), tourism has been benefiting from the continuous enhancements in technology. This enables improvements in organizational performance which in turn directly affects an organization competitiveness (Buhalis, 2003).

The Internet became a very important channel to search for information (Gursoy & McCleary, 2004; Pan & Fesenmaier, 2006), comprising different advantages for travelers. By providing online information the tourism industry allows travelers to access vast amounts of resources and purchase remote tourism products instantly, globally and at any time and every day (Graeupl, 2006; Buhalis & Law, 2008). Additionally, travelers can proceed to a greater customization of their products by engaging directly with suppliers (Tjostheim *et al.*, 2007; Buhalis & Law, 2008).

Gretzel *et al.* (2006) addressed different aspects of the Internet utility for travelers by dividing the traveler's consumption process in three stages (pre-consumption, consumption and post-consumption), in which at each stage, internet technology is used by travelers for different purposes (Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2009).

## **2. Service Quality and Satisfaction**

### **a) Service Quality**

Service quality is believed to depend on the gap between expected and perceived performance (Anderson *et al.*, 1994), as customers compare a priori expectations with actual service performance to form their judgement (Zeithaml *et al.*, 1993).

When service performance is perceived to be higher than service expectations, service quality is regarded as high. Therefore, the level of customer expectations determine service quality, for a fixed level of perceived service performance (Zeithaml *et al.*, 1990).

Among the many authors who have dedicated themselves to the study of service quality, even though the quality dimensions pointed out vary between them, three factors can be identified as positively predictors of service quality: outcome quality, interaction quality and physical environment quality (Rust & Oliver, 1993; Brady & Cronin Jr, 2001).

Donthu & Yoo (1998) alert to the inherent subjectivity to the importance given to each quality dimension, whether it is by individual and cultural differences or according to the service segment.

Different instruments have been developed to measure service quality, although the models created by Grönroos (1984) and Parasuraman *et al.* (1988) can be considered as pioneer models.

Grönroos (1984) describes the perceived service quality as a function of expected service (traditional marketing activities and external influence by traditions, ideology and word-of-mouth), perceived service and corporate image. It is based on both technical quality, received during service performance, and functional quality, related to the performance level observed subjectively, by considering the way the service was provided and the contact with the service provider. The corporate image dimension embodies the location and the available resources for the service provided. In this model, Grönroos defines two conclusions as critical for a service firm to keep the gap between the expected service and perceived service as small as possible:

- The comparison between the promises about service performance and the service the customers will eventually perceive must not be unrealistic. Therefore, firms need to pay attention to their traditional marketing activities and to the consequent word-of-mouth communication;
- It is important for managers to understand how the technical quality and the functional quality of a service is influenced, and how the two quality dimensions are perceived by the customers. Additionally, management needs to understand that the functional quality is a fundamental dimension of the perceived service and that in some cases, it is more important than the technical quality dimension.

Based on the Oliver satisfaction model (1980), Parasuraman *et al.* (1985) proposed a model for measuring the quality of service based on the comparison of the perceived service with expected service which allows the identification of gaps percentage. The authors suggested a set of ten dimensions by which customers evaluate service quality. Giving continuity to the research and refinement of that service quality assessment, Parasuraman *et al.* (1988) refined the determinants of quality from ten to five

dimensions, subdivided into 22 items, thus developing the SERVQUAL. The five dimensions of service quality are: reliability (ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately), responsiveness (willingness to help customers and provide prompt service), assurance (employees' knowledge and courtesy and their ability to inspire trust and confidence), empathy (caring, individualized attention given to customers) and tangibles (appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and written materials).

In opposition to SERVQUAL, Cronin Jr & Taylor (1992) created a new service quality assessment tool based only on the perceived service. The SERVPERF scale considers exclusively the service performance as a component to measure the quality of a service, thus eliminating the expectations factor, and being able to efficiently reduce by half the number of items to be measured.

According to Salomi *et al.*, (2005) there is no consensus in the literature regarding the existence of a more effective model for service quality measurement.

Described as a critical factor of success in the competition between companies, a good service quality helps to keep and attract new customers, to reduce costs, to enhance corporate image and to expand company's earnings (Ladhari, 2009).

## **b) Satisfaction**

Satisfaction can be seen as the consumer's fulfilment response with regard to their consumption goals as experienced and described by them (Oliver, 2006). In more detail, Oliver (1997, p. 13) defines that satisfaction is the consumers' *"judgment that a product or service feature, or the product or service itself, provided (or is providing) a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfilment, including levels of under- or over-fulfilment"*.

Using different researches and customer satisfaction models has been gaining highlight within organizations. On the one hand, customer satisfaction assumes importance as a way of assessing the overall performance of organizations as in a context of strong competition and with an informed and demanding consumer, there are numerous benefits to organizations when constant satisfaction evaluations are carried out

(Marchetti & Prado, 2001). On the other hand, customer satisfaction allows for improvements on items that have a lower satisfaction (Wicks & Roethlein, 2009; Rossi & Slongo, 1998).

Based on the existent literature from several authors, Tinoco & Ribeiro (2007) presented the main determinants of customer satisfaction: expectations, performance, disconfirmation of expectations, perceived value, price, pleasure, emotions, attributes and corporate image.

One of the first and most extensively accepted methods is the expectancy disconfirmation model proposed by Oliver (1980). Based on the discrepancy between customer expectations and his/her perceptions of performance, there is satisfaction if customer expectations are exceeded whereas if the performance of perception is below those expectations that translates into customer dissatisfaction. Therefore the confirmation or disconfirmation of expectations predicts satisfaction, being this comparison process in disconfirmation judgments primarily cognitive in nature. Wirtz & Bateson (1999) include the role of pleasure in the satisfaction process, stating that confirmation/disconfirmation has a direct and positive effect on pleasure and that both, in turn, have also direct and positive effects on satisfaction. Westbrook & Oliver (1991) demonstrated that different consumer affective experiences coexist with, and are related to satisfaction. When analyzing the patterns of consumption emotion, both the joy and contentment patterns are associated with high levels of satisfaction, while negative emotions are associated with lower satisfaction levels, although this negative pattern is not directly translated into dissatisfaction. Consumers' unemotional pattern is linked to moderately high levels of satisfaction. As such, Oliver (1993) added to the expectancy disconfirmation paradigm the role of attribute satisfaction/dissatisfaction, merging affect, disconfirmation and attribute-based satisfaction judgements in one model. Attribute satisfaction complements and is complemented by affects states, with these being triggered by different types of everyday experiences.

The perceived performance is directly and positively correlated with satisfaction, being this positive relationship the most frequently documented in the literature (Szymanski & Henard, 2001). Corporate image has a positive impact on customer satisfaction (Dennis *et al.*, 2007): although for customers with a high degree of service expertise the



corporate image has a weaker impact on customer satisfaction than for customers with a low degree of service expertise, customers with a low self-reported service expertise have corporate image as the strongest driver of future intended repurchase behavior, which is a primary step to achieve customer loyalty (Andreassen & Lindestad, 1998).

Another determinant believed to have positive impacts on customer satisfaction is the perceived value (Andreassen & Lindestad, 1998). According to Kotler & Keller (2006), the perceived value is the difference between the assessment of all benefits and costs of a product or service and the perceived alternatives made by a potential customer. The probability of satisfaction and repurchase depends on supply meeting the expectation value.

Price-performance also contributes to the impact on satisfaction judgements, with performance expectations having a significant effect on performance perceptions and satisfaction only when price and performance are consistent. (Voss *et al.*, 1998). Homburg *et al.* (2005) denotes to the situation where a high level of satisfaction decreases the negative impact of the magnitude of a price increase.

Addressing in greater detail the hospitality industry, Minghetti (2003) states that customer satisfaction depends highly on the accuracy and comprehensiveness of specific tourism information and on the ability of organizations to promptly react to consumer needs. In exchange, the value proposition offered to consumers' needs to be revised accordingly as they not only require value for money, but also value for time for the entire range of dealings made between them and organizations.

### **3. Service Failure**

Customer expectations can be specified on three different levels – (1) desired service, which reflects what customers want and hope to receive; (2) adequate service, a lower level which acknowledges the standard customers are willing to accept, i.e., what they consider of being reasonable towards a specific situation; and (3) predicted service, the level customers believe is more likely to occur and that as a positive influence in the adequate service (Zeithaml *et al.*, 1993).

Service failure occurs when there is a gap between the perceived service and the expected service (both desired and adequate service), occurring both when the perceived service fails to reach the adequate or desired service level or when the perceived service does not reach predicted service values. Service failures increase service expectations and contribute as well for increasing the risk of service recovery not occurring adequately (Zeithaml *et al.*, 1993).

Michel (2001) states that service failures are inevitable and can occur in both the process and the outcome of service delivery, failing to live up to customers' expectations.

Various causes can be categorized to determine service failures origins. Bitner *et al.* (1990) presents three causes originated by human actions during service delivery, namely due to employees' behavior: failures occurring through employees reply to core service problems; failures originated by employees reply to requests for customized service; and failures related to unexpected employee actions.

To Armistead *et al.* (1995) service failure can be of three different types – service provider error, customer error, or associated organizational error.

In this context, Bateson & Hoffman (2001) believe services take place in two different spaces – the stage, visible and open to customers; and the backstage, invisible to customers. Service failures that occur in the stage usually are caused by execution failures, as opposed to those who happen in the backstage space and are a consequence of process failures, which may or may not become noticeable to customers later on. These backstage failures, although harm the organization, usually do not reach the customer and therefore do not influence their satisfaction; if not it can then result in customer dissatisfaction.

As a result of being a negative experience for the customer, different authors have assessed the various consequences of service failure:

- dissatisfaction (Kelley *et al.*, 1994);
- decline in customer confidence (Boshoff, 1997; Boshoff & Leong, 1998);
- negative word-of-mouth behavior (Bailey, 1994; Mattila, 2001);
- customer defection (Keaveney, 1995; Miller *et al.*, 2000);

- loss of revenue and increased costs (Armistead *et al.*, 1995);
- And decrease in employee morale and performance (Bitner *et al.*, 1994). (B. R. Lewis & McCann, 2004, p.7)

The most common form of providing feedback to companies still takes place in private, either via survey, phone call, email, or letter to the company. Most recently opting for a louder, more visible and instantaneous method has been the chosen method for some unsatisfied consumers, by publicly airing criticisms through social media channels, in particular, Facebook (McInnes, 2010).

#### **4. Consumer Complaint Behavior**

From the extensive literature related to the definition or conceptualization of consumer complaint behavior (CCB), Singh (1988) stated that unsatisfactory purchase experience is the trigger to such event.

When experiencing service failure with a product or service, consumers can respond in different ways to address and resolve it. Day & Landon (1977) hierarchical framework suggested that consumers first decide whether to take an action of communicating dissatisfaction or not to take any action. Secondly, the decision lies in whether consumers decide to take action privately or publicly. Consumers take private actions by disassociating themselves with the product or service (brand switching) and/or engaging in negative word-of-mouth. On the other hand, public actions include seeking redress directly from the organization, complaining directly to public or private agencies or even taking legal action.

Singh (1988) proposed a second approach which identified three sets of responses to the negative consumption trigger: complain or express concerns to the firm at the moment of failure or afterwards (e.g., seek redress from the seller), word-of-mouth complaining to others and third-party responses (e.g., take legal action). The author projects this classification on identifying the object towards which the consumer complaint behavior (CCB) responses are directed. Voice CCB (direct complaining) is aimed at objects that are directly involved in the dissatisfying exchange, although it also includes the no-action responses as they itself reflect feelings towards the seller. Private responses

(word-of-mouth communication) are directed at objects that are external to the consumer but not directly involved in the dissatisfying experience (e.g., friends, relatives) and, as the final category, third-party CCB includes actions that are directed at formal external parties, such as the legal system.

Day (1984) suggested a different conceptualization of consumer complaint behavior from the perspective of the goals being sought, classifying them into three broad themes: redress seeking (complain to an organization or take legal action in the hope of obtaining some form of compensation), complaining (engaging in negative word-of-mouth to make others aware of the service failure), and personal boycotting (switching to an alternative provider).

As for the motives behind complaining, Kowalski & Erickson (1997) identified four functions of complaining behavior: catharsis (venting); self-presentation (impression management); social comparison (testing one's own perception against other) and call for accounts (redress tactic). Wetzler *et al.* (2007) found that the different emotions associated with dissatisfaction will be associated with various behavioral actions, namely an experience of disappointment and regret by the consumer being associated with the will of warning others through word-of-mouth communication. Price *et al.*, (1995) research indicated a relationship between altruism and market helping behavior, i.e. consumers act to benefit others in their consumption experiences.

Despite the limited combined research of online complaints and the hospitality industry, some authors were able to identify the nature of service failure that occur in hotels and the typology of these complaints. Mattila & Mount (2003) identified service quality concerns, reservation concerns and room accommodation problems as the most frequently mentioned failure categories, respectively. In their study, Sparks & Browning (2010) targeted complaints as internal features to the hotel or external to the hotel. The results found most complaints to be focused on the hotel itself, with room features to be the most frequently reported, followed by problems related to consumer service and then problems about public areas of the hotel.

Research on complaint behavior allowed to found connections with some demographic variables. Regarding gender, female customers have a higher intention to complain (Keng *et al.*, 1995) and tell others if they are dissatisfied with the complaint handling

(R. C. Lewis, 1983b). Manickas & Shea (1997) findings revealed a contradicting behavior, as male customers complained more than the female.

Day & Landon (1977) stated that consumers who publicly complained were younger in age and had a better education and higher income. Similar results were found by Bearden & Mason (1984), in which complaint behavior was inversely related to age and positively linked to income and education.

## **5. Service Recovery**

Upon a service failure is noticed, arises the potential for a service provider to reverse the customer problem and conduct a service recovery process, which includes *“those activities in which a company engages to address a customer complaint”* (Grönroos, 1990, p.7) and the *“actions designed to resolve problems, alter negative attitudes of dissatisfied customers and to ultimately retain these customers”* (Miller *et al.*, 2000, p.388).

Lovelock defines recovery as a set of systematic efforts made by the company after service failure with the intention to fix a problem and retain customer loyalty and satisfaction (Lovelock, 1983).

Complainants' level of satisfaction is determined by the type of organizational response. Therefore, it becomes crucial providing an appropriate response. Different literature approaches about how to handle complaints in the organizational environment have been developed. The theory of image restoration (Benoit, 1997a; Benoit, 1997b) focus on the various message options a company has when facing a crisis. This theory classifies image repair strategies into five broad categories, with some sectioned in sub-categories.

- Denial: simple denial; shifting the blame to another person or entity;
- Evasion of responsibility: provocation, as the organization act was a response to another's offensive act; defeasibility, by pleading lack of information about or control over the situation; accident; act was performed with good intentions;

- Reducing offensiveness of event: bolstering, by stressing good traits; minimization of the negative feelings associated with the wrongful act; differentiate the act from other similar but more offensive actions; transcendence, by attempting a more favorable context to the situation; attack the accuser; compensation by offering to remunerate the victim;
- Corrective action: company promises to correct the problem;
- Mortification: apologizing for the act.

Davidow (2003) made an extensive analysis of complaint management literature focused on research studies about organizational responses to complaints. Based on Boshoff (1999) and Smith *et al.*, (1999) complaint recovery frameworks, Davidow (2000) differentiates six dimensions of organizational responses to complaints:

- Timeliness: speed with which the organization responded to a complaint;
- Facilitation: companies' policies, procedures, and tools in place to support complainants;
- Redress: actual outcome complainants receive from the organization in response to the complaint (compensation, replacement, repairs, refunds).
- Apology: considered as a psychological compensation, it is an acknowledgment by the company of the complainants' distress;
- Credibility: explanation provided by the organization for the complainants' problem, explaining what went wrong and what the organization will do to prevent future occurrences;
- Attentiveness: interpersonal communication and interaction between the organization representative and the complainant, including the respect, courtesy and empathy towards complainants and also the willingness to listen from the representative part.

According to Davidow (2003), interpersonal skills (as evidenced by attentiveness and credibility) and redress represent the dimensions with major impact on complainant satisfaction.

With the hospitality industry as background, B. R. Lewis & McCann (2004) research intended to, among other objectives, evaluate the service recovery strategies used by hotels and their effectiveness in the hotel industry in the UK. For the purpose they used/identified the following specific list of recovery strategies:

- Apology
- Problem corrected
- Explanation provided
- Immediate action
- Did nothing
- Hotel took responsibility for the problem
- Followed up to see if the customer was satisfied with response to problem
- Redirected the complaint
- Compensation provided
- Exceptional treatment

Restoring satisfaction also requires responsiveness by the organization. In their research on relational maintenance strategies in an online context, Kelleher & Miller (2006) empirically derived a factor of responsiveness/customer service which they described as *“an organization's willingness to respond promptly to customer inquiries and complaints”* (p. 404). Previous research has shown low to mediocre levels of responsiveness to emails or forum complaints (Jean Harrison-Walker, 2001; Strauss & Hill, 2001).

Lewis' (1983a) study relied on hotel complainants who were not satisfied to suggest what organizational responses would satisfy them. Results showed that 46% consumers indicated that money refund would be a reasonable resolution and 29% would have been satisfied with a better communication, a more pleasant relationship or if a proper response from management was given. The remaining 25% would have considered themselves satisfied with complementary rooms and/or meals.

Mattila & Mount (2003) research on the impact of customers' technology readiness and response time via e-mail found that satisfaction with complaint handling and repurchase

intentions are directly related to the response time from the hotel company. In their investigation 40% of the respondents received a response within 48 hours, with 16% indicating an immediate response to their problem, and 60% had to wait for more than 48 hours.

Few empirical studies have investigated the reactions of complaining consumers in relation to the responses they received from organizations. Satisfaction or dissatisfaction with a company complaint response may influence the subsequent repurchase intention of complainants (Kelly, 1979) whereas in the hospitality industry, Lewis (1983a) found that complaint handling by hotels was the major factor in the likelihood of complainants choosing to stay at the hotel again.

Service recovery is therefore of utmost importance for companies and organizations. When efficiently conducted, service providers can avoid negative results and may even increase customer loyalty and satisfaction, whereas an inefficient recovery is keen to enlarge undesirable results for the company and its customers (Priluck & Lala, 2009).

Regarding gender characterization in a service recovery context, McColl-Kennedy *et al.* (2003) found that male and female customers had significantly different preferences towards of how companies should handle service recovery. Their research showed women as being more participatory than men, by wanting more discussion during the service recovery process. While women were particularly interested in how the company handles the service recovery process, male customers were more concerned with the outcome of the service recovery. Furthermore, Hess *et al.* (2003) found that female customers have higher service recovery expectations than male customers.

## **6. Social Media**

Among the many authors there is no consensus regarding the definition of social media, since it is a dynamic and growing trend. Indeed, changes in settings, rapid innovation and the reinvention of these settings are a strong feature inherent in social media (Mayfield, 2008).

Allowing the content generated by consumers to be easily distributed and accessed through these online tools (Sterne, 2010), this form of media “*describes a variety of*



*new sources of online information that are created, initiated, circulated and used by consumers' intent on educating each other about products, brands, services, personalities, and issues"* (Mangold & Faulds, 2009, p. 358).

According to Mayfield (2008), social media is described as a group of online media that share five main characteristics:

- Participation and engagement: social media calls for and is a means for users' participation and feedback through online conversations and contributions;
- Openness: most social media allow the participation of any user and by its nature imposes some freedom to the audience, whether it is through comments, voting or sharing information. The creation and establishment of trustworthy relationships with and among users is encouraged, using total transparency;
- Conversation: unlike mass media where contents are distributed in one-way conversation, social media provides a two-way communication;
- Community: the creation and development of communities is the most important outcome of social media, being a space for information and content sharing between users with similar interests;
- Connectedness: in social media the various social media online platforms, users and resources are always connected with each other.

Among the existing online platforms, Zarrella (2009) and Mayfield (2008) distinguish several types of social media as the most important:

- Blogs: websites of easy update, usually organized in a chronological way and built around a specific theme; these websites can be managed by a multiple number of users;
- Wikis: a set of multiple pages that can be viewed and edited by any user;
- Social networks: group of individuals who interact via online networks through comments, shares, check- ins, reviews, and that use text, audio, photo and video for social , professional and educational purposes;

- Content sharing communities: communities which organize and share specific types of contents, but mainly photos, videos and links;
- Podcasts: audio and video files that are available through the subscription of certain services;
- Social bookmarking: a free access system with the aim to share specific information with other users, by reuniting users' *online* favorites in just one space;
- Forums: online discussion spaces, usually divided by topics and specific interests;
- Virtual worlds: computationally simulated environments designed to use and allow the interaction of its users through avatars;
- Poll sites;
- Review sites.

People access and engage in social media for different reasons, given that each user has its own motivations (Safko, 2010). Muntinga *et al.*, (2010) classified the motivations for social media use into six categories: information, personal identity, integration and social interaction, entertainment, remuneration and empowerment. The fundamentals to explain these reasons for the use of social media were based on the theory of uses and gratifications, in which users who are actively involved in the media consumption process chose and use the media in accordance to their desires, needs or wants. It is thus an analysis focused and based from individual users' perspective.

Concerning the tourism industry, Wang & Fesenmaier (2003) were two of the researchers who investigated the motivational factors of travelers to generate online content. Their research in online communities identified three important factors that instigate travelers to contribute to those social media platforms - helping other users, sharing enjoyment and seeking/providing advice.

Companies can benefit from social media for many reasons. When compared to traditional advertising social media is of low cost (Masterson & Tribby, 2008). It allows

companies to learn not only about their customers' preferences but also to learn from the feedback given by them (Kierzkowski *et al.*, 1996). Able to reach any user on global scale, social media offers companies a great opportunity to reach out to potential and current customers (O'Connor, 2011). This configures an added-value feature, especially for small and medium sized companies (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Companies can therefore create a greater brand awareness, increasing their visibility (Shih, 2010).

It is important for companies to learn how to create and sustain social relationships with their consumers over time in order to create a network around their services and products (Shih, 2010). When interacting with customers, companies should create relevant and engaging content to foster a greater and better communication between them and their customers (O'Connor, 2011). Organizations can use various design features to create and develop appealing social media pages, whether through challenging users to take a quiz and poll (Withiam, 2011) or through the application of open-ended questions, prompt to "like", photo posts, fill-in the blank posts or trivia to foster user interaction (HeBS, 2011).

Although displaying several advantages, social media have a less positive side, as it is easy for consumers to express a complaint when a product or service does not meet their expectations. Companies need therefore to intersect these complaints in the shortest time possible in order to minimize any potential resulting damages. As negative comments cannot be deleted or controlled, companies need to be present in same platforms where comments are exposed in order to address this problem and take appropriate action measures. As a consequence, if properly tackled, a company can reverse this type of negative situations into knowledge, defining its strategy (Withiam, 2011; Evans, 2010).

Therefore, from a corporate perspective, social media presents both a challenge and a tremendous opportunity (Aula, 2010; Nair, 2011). Based on the target market, the message being delivered and the level of control over how the message is disseminated, companies are able to choose the adequate social media platform to interact with their users (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). This presence in social media must be integrated with the company traditional media to increase the likelihood of a higher consumer

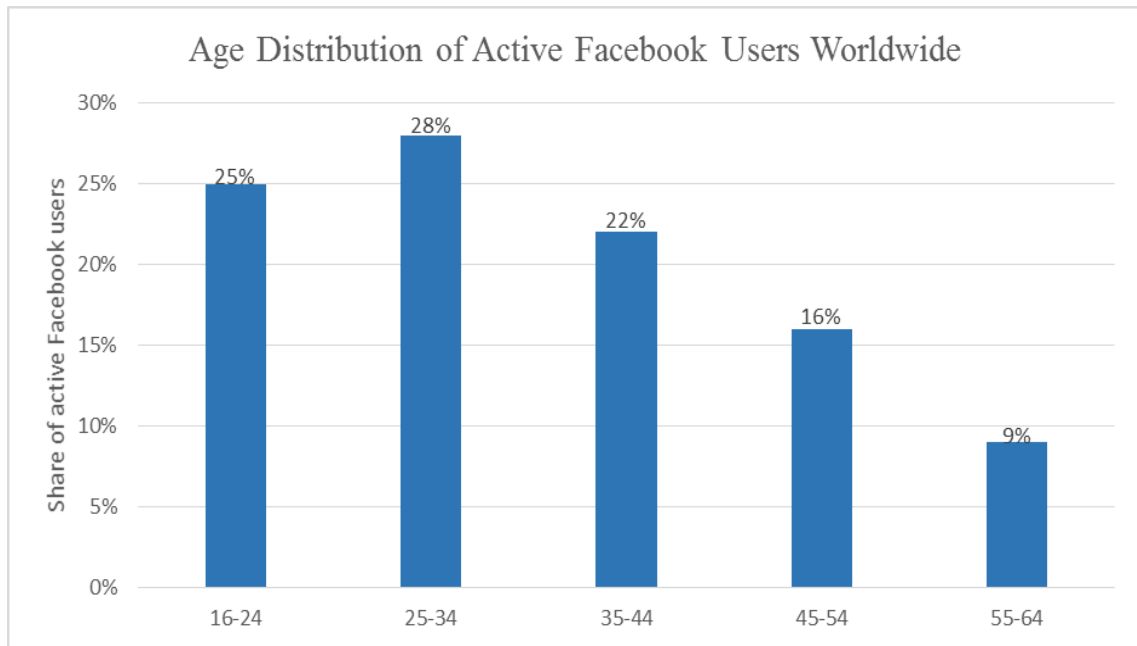
engagement and to construct a cohesive brand image (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

## **7. Facebook**

Facebook is a social network launched in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg at Harvard University. Restricted in the beginning only to Harvard students, it was designed to facilitate efficient communication between family, friends and coworkers but it rapidly expanded to other educational institutions and later to the rest of the world. Since 2006, anyone over 13 years and with a valid e-mail can become a user. (Facebook, 2013)

Also in 2006 Facebook began the process of allowing the creation of company profile pages in the network by inviting ten elite companies, including Apple, Amazon.com and Electronic Arts, to set up their company profiles. A year later, they extended the invitation to all companies (Champoux *et al.*, 2012).

Facebook is currently the leading global social media platform, with a total of 1.39 billion monthly active users in the last quarter of 2014 (the 1 billion number was surpassed in the third quarter of 2012). Of the total monthly active users, 208 million are from the USA and Canada, 301 million are European, 449 million are from the Asia-Pacific area and 426 million represent the rest of the world (Facebook, 2015). Regarding worldwide users distribution age, in 2014 28% of global active Facebook users were between 16 and 24 years old, with the majority of users being under 35 years old, as Table 2 shows (Statista, 2015).



**Figure 1- Age Distribution of Active Facebook Users Worldwide (4th quarter 2014)**

Source: Statista, 2015

According to Shih (2010) the Facebook was created to distinct itself from other social networks, by having specific characteristics that were intended to make a difference:

- Email domain authentication: the authentication used on Facebook is also allowed as a form of authentication in other sites that use a specific application, facilitating an interconnection between different platforms and an easier access to its users;
- Authentic relationships: Facebook was designed to match and embodied the real world such as schools, organizations, colleagues and friends. Since the beginning it has always encouraged users to add and only accept other users they may know, which allows to build a trustworthy environment;
- Privacy settings: it is possible to create different friend lists and change the privacy settings for each list so that each user only shares whatever with whoever.
- Exclusiveness: the process of being initial available just for Harvard students and then growing gradually to the world, allowed to create a certain exclusivity, making it more desirable and reliable.

Facebook gives companies a considerable number of options to interact and produce quality content, namely the establishment of a relationship with existing and potential clients, post sales information, promotions and the announcement and promotion of new or existing products. A company can also develop a more intellectual communication, whether by educating its customers through the publication of research data and relevant articles, or by encouraging followers to engage in social causes (Champoux *et al.*, 2012). Additionally, Facebook fan pages function as an effective marketing tool for honest and transparent word-of-mouth (Kerpen, 2011).

To better succeed and have a positive impact on site users, companies fan pages must be authentic, by creating a personal atmosphere between users and the fan page operators (Kerpen, 2011), and should also promote deeper relationships both among fans and between fans and the company (Lin & Lu, 2011).

According to Clockwork (2010) several hotel companies already use their Facebook pages as an extension of customer service and as a communication tool, mainly to:

- Promote special offers;
- Promote special rates for their Facebook fans;
- Offering fan contests;
- Promote a portfolio of properties;
- Distribution of surveys;
- Promote events;
- Enable bookings;
- Promote latest news.

### III. METHODOLOGY

Finished the literature review of this investigation it is imperative to expose the procedures used to obtain the desired results.

This chapter aims to present the methodological framework of our research and it is divided into four key points. First, the chosen research design methods for this empirical study are presented, followed by a description of the criteria for choosing the hotel chains for analysis. Then the data collection process is described, including the target audience and the research variables and, finally, there is the description of the descriptive research phase, including the statistical analysis techniques to be used and the survey formulation.

#### 1. Research Design Methods

The nature of a scientific work requires the use of a methodology suitable for the type of research in order to achieve reliable results and find correct answers to the identified research problem, thus determining the combination of research design to be employed.

Given the proposed objectives, this research includes both exploratory and descriptive research. The initial step in the overall research design framework assumed an exploratory nature. With the primary aim *“the provision of insights into, and comprehension of, the problem situation confronting the researcher”* (Malhotra, 2008), exploratory research allows to define a research problem and formulate its hypotheses with greater precision and then find patterns, ideas or hypotheses (Babbie, 1989). Thereby, exploratory research in the form of secondary data analysis (published secondary data and computerized databases) was conducted in the present study to gain additional insights before developing a proper approach.

Then, a descriptive research phase was undertaken, involving the observation method through content analysis as well as a cross-sectional survey. This particular research method involves gathering data that describe events and then organizes, tabulates, depicts and describes the data collected (Glass & Hopkins, 1970). It is then possible to

gather quantifiable information to be used for statistical inference and determine the degree of association between variables (Malhotra, 2008).

The research methods referred to in this research step will be explained in more detail in the next points.

## **2. Selection of Hotel Chains on Facebook**

This research is a deepening and extension of some aspects of the Master's student's investigation in the same research work field – Silva, (2013). As such, the methodological options chosen follow the pattern of that study, beginning with the selection process of the three targeted hotel chains.

To select the three hotel chains two lists were considered for analysis. The first one consisted in Bedouk (2012) identifying the "Best hotel chain's pages on Facebook", while the second list was obtained through *Fan Page List* (2013), a social media directory of official Facebook fan pages and Twitter accounts which allows searching for specific users, namely searching through a list of lodging brands. For this purpose, a data analysis on fans and their online participation in the hotels' Facebook page was conducted in the period of October 5<sup>th</sup> 2013 to October 12<sup>th</sup> 2013.

To evaluate the performance and success of Facebook pages it were analyzed the growth of the number of followers and number of fan posts on the hotel chains pages (Preece *et al.*, 2004).

From the provisional obtained list it was possible to choose the three hotel chains that best met the two criteria, as shown in the following table. It should also be added that the choice fell on hotel chains and not on specific hotels or resorts of hospitality brands that operate on a global scale, not differentiating their categories.



**Table 2 - Hotel Chains Selection**

<b>Hotel Chains</b>	<b>Fan Posts</b>	<b>Growth of fans (%)</b>
<b>Hilton Hotels &amp; Resorts</b>	59	1.41%
<b>Marriott Hotels &amp; Resorts</b>	43	0.17%
<b>Riu Hotels &amp; Resorts</b>	44	0.93%

Source: Facebook.com, 5/10/2013 – 12/10/2013

### **3. Descriptive Research Analysis**

#### **a) Data Collection**

Given the object of analysis of this study, the target population were the followers of the Facebook pages of the three mentioned hotel chains, consisting therefore in any individual registered on Facebook with more than 13 years old and that assumed the role of complainant in relation to the analyzed hotel chains.

Data collection was conducted between December 20<sup>th</sup> 2013 and July 20<sup>th</sup> 2014, a period in which all comments – positive and complaints – posted by hotel guests in each of the three Facebook profile pages were collected and analyzed, as well as all the other possible and necessary data content from each of the hotels' Facebook profile relevant for analysis.

The first step consisted in a daily raw data collection of each hotel's Facebook page information, namely:

- Total number of fans - defines the total number of followers who like the Facebook page;

- Fans growth rate - defines the growth of fans on a certain date compared with a previous date;

- Number of “people talking about” - defines the total number of people citing a Facebook page on a certain date, regardless of whether they like the relevant page;

- Brand Posts - defines the total number of posts made by the Facebook page administrator;

- Brand Posts type – distribution of each brand post as photo, status, link, video or event;

- Interaction in brand posts - defines the total number of interactions made in the brand posts, which includes shares, comments and likes;

- Fan Posts – defines the total number of posts made by fans of a Facebook page;

- Fan Posts distribution – cataloging of each fan post as a positive comment or a complaint;

- Positive Fan Posts type – distribution of each positive fan post as appraisal, publicity, job application, help or suggestions.

A second part in this data collection process involves the collection of a large number of existing features in the complaints about the services provided by each of the hotel chains. For this purpose, based on the observation and analysis of the complaints collected from each of the pages, a set of categories of such complaints was created and it was firstly adapted from an existing one found in Silva (2013). The adapted table can be consulted in Appendix A.

The twelve aggregate categories identified are:

- 1) Booking
- 2) Front Desk
- 3) Restaurant
- 4) Bar
- 5) Room-service
- 6) Breakfast
- 7) Room
- 8) Toilets
- 9) Floors

- 10) Common Areas
- 11) Complimentary Services
- 12) General Complaints

Additionally, for each of the gathered complaints it was collected the date of the complaint, the gender of the complainant, the existence or absence of a reply from the organization, the reaction of the complainant towards the previous data - classifying this as positive, negative or neutral – and also the amount of time between posting a complaint and the hotel response. It is important to mention that given a more subjective nature of the classification on this last point, the classification was made by two different people in order to be possible to validate the results obtained in the end.

### **b) Data Processing - Statistical Analysis**

The methodology used includes the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data, which are then exported to a series of databases and analyzed using the *IBM SPSS Statistics 22 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences)*, using for this purpose a univariate and bivariate analysis.

For the first step of the data analysis, which includes a more detailed characterization of the Facebook pages and their contents, as it is non metric data – nominal and ordinal scale - a univariate statistical technique was used:

- Frequency distribution

Mathematical distribution which considers one variable at a time and whose objective is to obtain a count of the number of responses associated with different values of that single variable, expressing this relative occurrence in percentage terms (Malhotra, 2008).

Additionally, the frequency data can be used to construct histograms for a more complete analysis.

With the goal of analyzing in more detail all complaints posted by users on Facebook pages of the three hotel chains and in order to find answers to the research questions, the remaining analysis procedure of the collected data consisted in the use of bivariate statistical techniques: cross-tables, chi-square test and, if justified, the Cramer's V test.

- Cross-Tables

Cross-tabulation, or contingency tables, is a statistical technique that allows describing two or more variables simultaneously, resulting in tables that reveal the joint distribution of two or more variables with a limited number of categories or distinct values (Malhotra, 2008). It is thus a good and of easy-interpretation tool to help comprehend how variables relate with each other. This analysis consists in bivariate cross-tabulation, as each table presents two variables each.

- Chi-Square Test

In order to observe whether there is a systematic association between the two variables, it is used the chi-square statistic (Pearson). This allows testing the statistical significance of the observed association in a cross-tabulation (Malhotra, 2008). As the test comprehends the existence of two hypothesis, for all the cases where chi-square was valid it shall be assumed the following:

*H<sub>0</sub>– There is no association between the two variables (independent variables)*

*H<sub>1</sub> – There is a relationship between the two variables (dependent variables)*

To prove our hypothesis, a significance level of  $p \leq 0.01$  was used.

- Cramer's V Test

When there is an association between variables it is possible to measure the strength of that relationship. Given that the cross-tabulation tables are larger than 2x2, it is necessary to use a modified version of the phi coefficient – the Cramer's V statistic. The V values range from 0 (no association) to 1 (perfect association) (Malhotra, 2008).

## **c) Survey**

### **i. Structure**

In order to assess the hotel guests' satisfaction level, a survey was conducted to those who resorted to Facebook as a platform to express their complaints, with the literature review as a theoretical support.

Measuring the degree of post-complaint satisfaction of the guests of the three hotel chains implies getting an opinion and personalized analysis of each complainant regarding the different criteria expected to be met. Given the research questions and the nature of the theme itself, the decision fell on using a structured questionnaire as the way to collect the necessary data.

As there was no direct interaction with the respondents of the questionnaire, whether it is a verbal or eye to eye one, it was of key importance to use a careful language in order to avoid double-barreled questions, as well as to put the questions in a pre-arranged order.

To obtain the desired information from the complainants, different type of questions were used in order to elicit specific information. Both unstructured and structured questions were applied, with the latter taking the major part in the questionnaire in the form of multiple-choice, dichotomous and scale. The sample characterization was done using open-ended questions which also allowed to get more detailed data regarding the reasons behind complaints.

In Appendix B it is possible to see the full questionnaire sent to the Hilton Hotel & Resorts complainants. The same survey was sent to Marriott Hotel & Resorts and RIU Hotels and Resorts complainants, with the necessary changes regarding the hotel name.

### **ii. Implementation Process**

Aiming to obtain information from the complainants of the three hotel chains, the survey target public was, consequently, any individual registered on Facebook that

assumed the role of complainant in relation to the referred hotel chains, in the period between December 20<sup>th</sup> 2013 and June 15<sup>th</sup> 2014.

For the questionnaire implementation, electronic interviewing, administered on the internet, was the chosen survey method.

As the total complaints carried out on each of the pages of the three hotel chains were already in a previously collected database, the first step was to send the survey to each of the identified Facebook profiles, properly distributed by each of the hotel chains. The sending of the surveys was carried out through a private message service provided by Facebook, consisting in a link directing each complainant to the proper survey, starting on April 23 2014 (see Appendix C). Initially, 174 surveys were sent to Hilton Hotels & Resorts complainants, 136 surveys to Marriott Hotels & Resorts' and 32 to RIU Hotels and Resorts'.

Facebook messaging policy enables any profile to send messages to anyone in the social network. However, messages sent to people with whom there is no connection may go into their "Other folder" (Facebook, 2014), i.e. the message does not appear in the main inbox and the user does not receive a new message notification.

Consequently, given the small number of survey responses received until the beginning of June 2014, it was necessary to resort to another tool provided by Facebook - a system that allows the person to pay in order to send messages to non-friends' inboxes. In this service users are required to pay a certain amount depending on the addressee's country.

The following procedure was thus reviewing each of the complainants' profiles collected to date, in a subjective and superficial way, in order to select probable active profiles to send the survey again, thereby avoiding the payment of sending messages to fake or inactive Facebook users.

As a result, between June 2<sup>nd</sup> 2014 and June 15<sup>th</sup> 2014 a total of 277 paid messages were sent (126 concerning Hilton Hotels & Resorts, 81 about Marriott Hotels & Resorts and 70 regarding RIU Hotels and Resorts), in an amount of 177,47 Euros.

## IV. RESULTS

### 1. Facebook Data

#### a) Number of Facebook Fans

The number of fans of a Facebook page indicates the total number of users that left a like on the page in question and thus can follow in their news feed updates and all type of contents created by that same page.

The chart below shows a linear growth behavior in the number of fans of the three hotel chains in the period of analysis, not having existed growth peaks by any of the three. With a total of 1,164,535 fans on Dec 20<sup>th</sup> 2012, Hilton Hotels & Resorts presented a 4% growth rate reaching a total of 1,214,542 fans on July 20<sup>th</sup>. With a similar behavior, the Marriott hotel chain achieved a 3% growth rate, increasing from 1,437,941 to 1,477,022 fans in the same period. In turn, RIU Hotels and Resorts had the biggest evolution along the seven months period – increased from 362,118 to 481,588 fans, with a consequent growth rate of 33%.

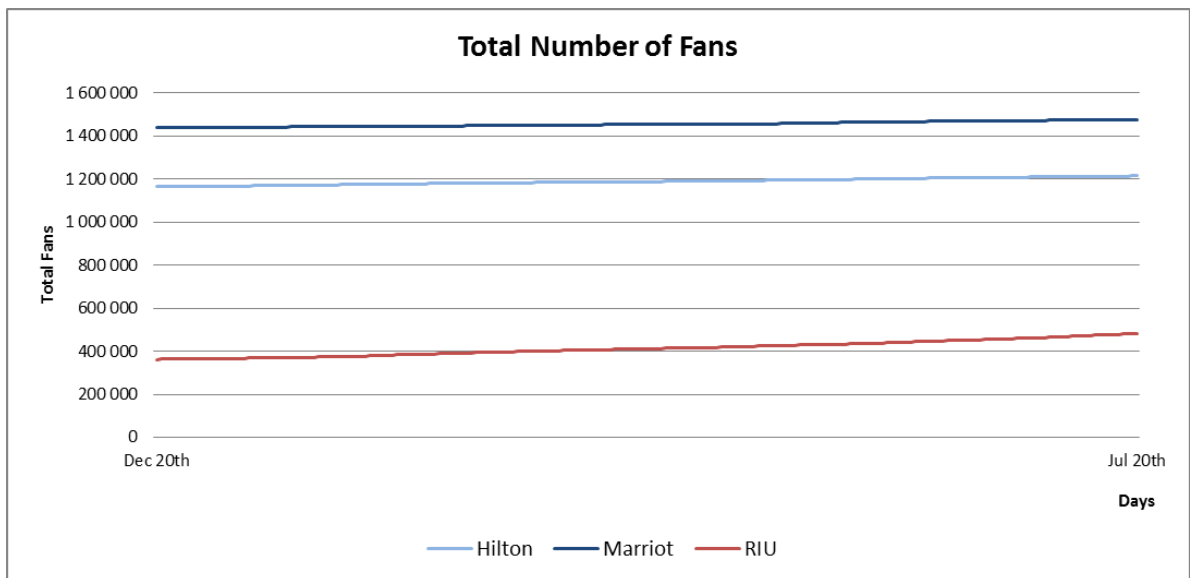
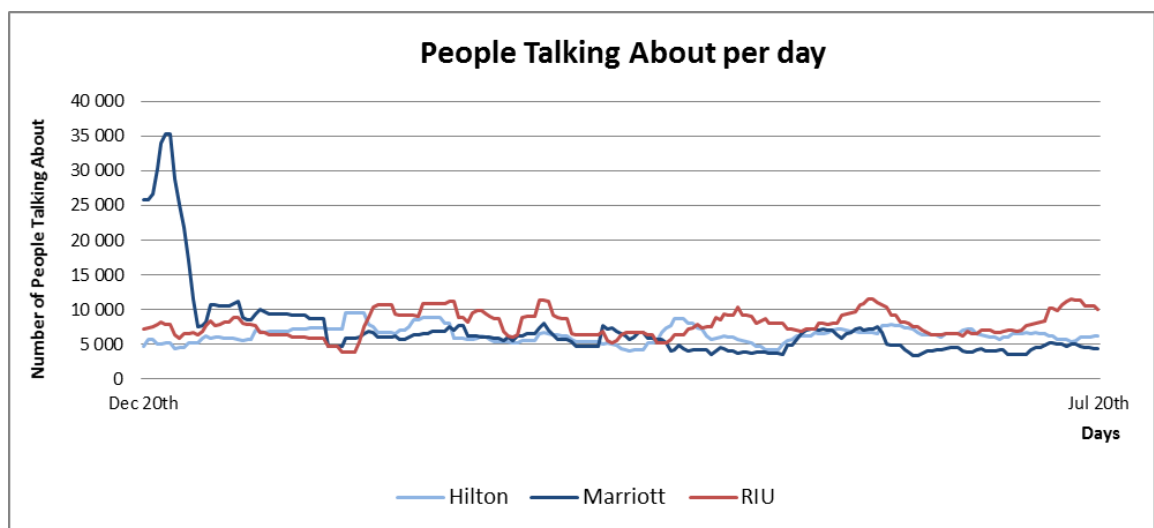


Figure 2- Total Number of Fans

The People Talking About metric states the number of direct interactions with a page, i.e., the number of single users – any Facebook user, not only fans of a given page - who create a "story" about that page in a 7-day period, either through immediate actions (comments, likes and shares of posts) or through other actions, such as publishing posts on the page, mentioning the page in posts, either private or group ones, among others. This parameter is thus influenced by and may reflect actions or events, whether internal / external to the page and either positive / negative, which directly modify the number of fans of a page and / or make also vary the number of People Talking About. Both Champoux *et al.*, (2012) and (Silva, 2013) show real examples of events that had a negative impact on Facebook pages.

The analysis of the Figure 3 enables to observe, except for the Marriott Hotels & Resorts in the month of December (it was not possible to identify the reason(s) behind that fluctuation), a similar behavior among all hotel chains, marked by small, natural fluctuations over the period of analysis.



**Figure 3 - Number of People Talking About**



### b) Brand Posts

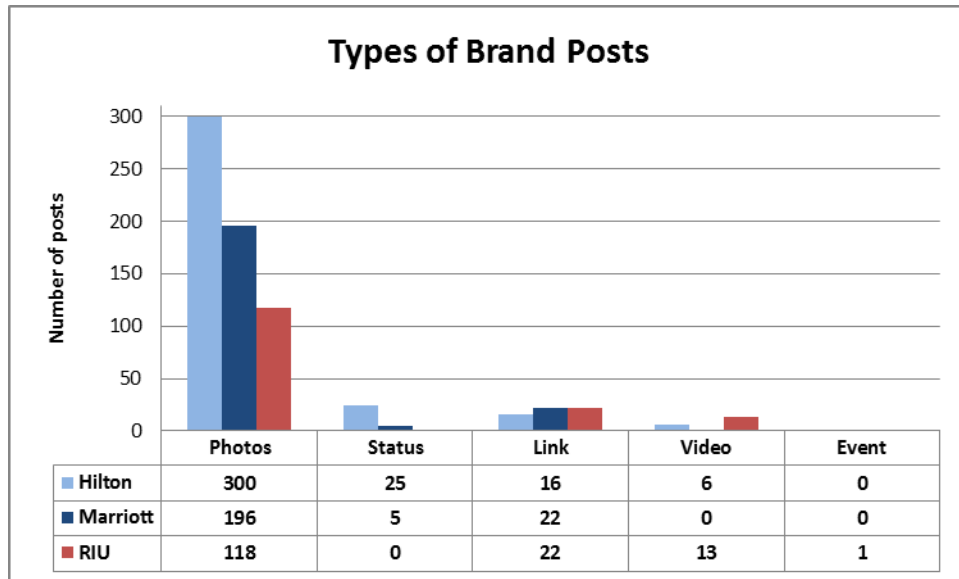
Regarding brand posts - all online content created by each Facebook page - all posts made by each of the three hotel chains during the data collection were analyzed in order to obtain the frequency and type of posts, as well as the fans interaction.

**Table 3- Number of Brand Posts**

	Frequency	Percent
<i>Hilton Hotels &amp; Resorts</i>	347	47.9%
<i>Marriott Hotels &amp; Resorts</i>	223	30.8%
<i>RIU Hotels and Resorts</i>	154	21.3%
Total	724	100%

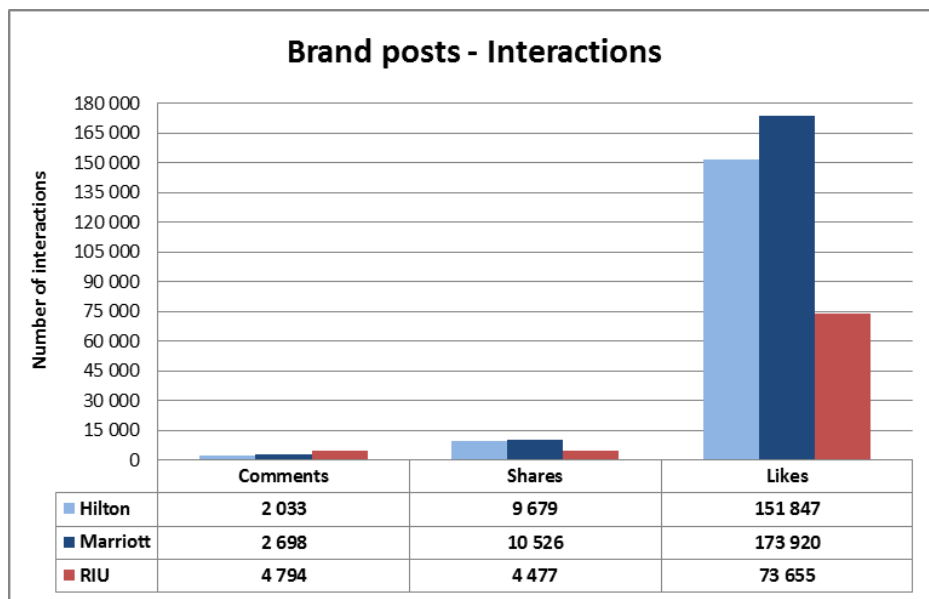
With a total of 347 posts, Hilton Hotels & Resorts hotel chain was the one with the higher number of brand posts, followed by the Marriott Hotels & Resorts with 223 brand posts and, finally, RIU Hotels and Resorts with 154 posts, reaching a total of 724 brand posts.

Brand posts were characterized as being photos, status, links, videos or events. As shown in the graph below, all three hotel chains reveal a preference towards photo posts, highly standing out from the others. In overall numbers link posts are the second most common type of post, although for the Hilton Hotels & Resorts status posts have a slight numerical advantage over the first ones. For RIU Hotels and Resorts no status posts were created. In the remaining options, video posts came in fourth place of preference (total number of posts) - with zero posts from the Marriott Hotels & Resorts, followed by events, with the latter appearing only once as a choice from the RIU hotel chain.



**Figure 4 - Types of Brand Posts**

The last analysis on brand posts, fan interaction, resulted in analyzing the three options made available from the Facebook to each user to interact in a post – comment, share or like. In all three hotel chains the most common form of interaction is to put a like on a post, as Figure 5 shows. For the other possibilities, Hilton Hotels & Resorts and the Marriott Hotels & Resorts fans have the same preferences, choosing to share a post instead of commenting on the same post while in RIU Hotels and Resorts sharing a post is the least used option.



**Figure 5 - Brand Posts – Interactions**

### c) Fan Posts

In order to achieve the required results to answer the investigation questions raised, the fans' and visitors' posts on the pages of each hotel chain were also analyzed, with such analysis comprising the number of fans' posts, a distribution between positive posts and complaints and, finally, a distribution of the positive posts by type. In order to facilitate writing and reading comprehension, fans and visitors to Facebook pages are listed under the designation of fans.

As it is not mandatory to be a fan of a particular Facebook public page in order to be able to create a post, it does not necessarily exist a link between the number of fans of a page and its number of interactions. Table 4 presents Marriott Hotels & Resorts as the hotel chain with the highest number (1,254) of fan posts, evidencing what was mentioned previously, as it is not the one with the highest number of fans. Hilton Hotels & Resorts got a total of 1,067 fan posts, corresponding to a total of 32.8% fan posts in all three Facebook pages and, slightly below, RIU Hotels and Resorts appears with a 28.9 percent with a total of 929 fan posts.

**Table 4 - Number of Fan Posts**

	Frequency	Percent
<i>Hilton Hotels &amp; Resorts</i>	1,067	32.8%
<i>Marriott Hotels &amp; Resorts</i>	1,254	38.6%
<i>RIU Hotels and Resorts</i>	929	28.6%
Total	3,250	100%

With the aim of understanding the reason(s) why a fan creates a post in one of the Facebook pages in analysis, the fan posts were divided into two categories – positive posts and complaints (Table 5).

Out of the total of 3,250 fan posts from all three hotel chains, 2,201 posts were positive and 1,049 were complaints. RIU Hotels and Resorts stood out from the others as 90.5%

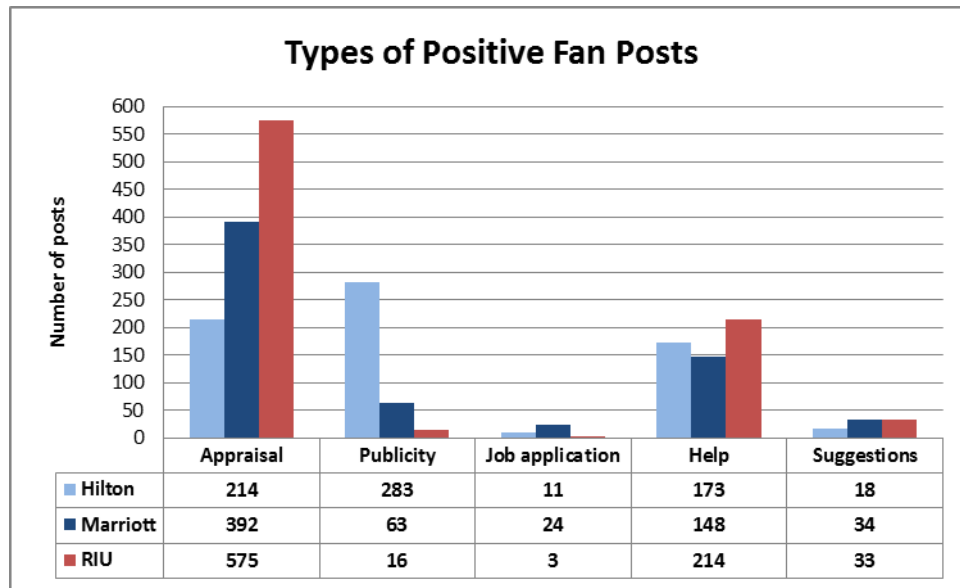
of its fan posts were positive (841 positive posts against 88 complaints). From Hilton Hotels & Resorts, 368 complaints accounted for 34.5% of their posts; as for Marriott Hotels & Resorts, 47.3% of the posts were complaints, therefore being the one with the highest number of complaints.

**Table 5 - Distribution of Fan Posts**

	Number of Positive Posts	Percent of Positive Posts	Number of Complaints	Percent of Complaints
<i>Hilton Hotels &amp; Resorts</i>	699	65.5%	368	34.5%
<i>Marriott Hotels &amp; Resorts</i>	661	52.7%	593	47.3%
<i>RIU Hotels and Resorts</i>	841	90.5%	88	9.5%
Total	2,201		1,049	

A more detailed analysis of the positive fan posts allowed categorizing them into five different types, i.e. five different reasons why fans decided to leave a positive post in one of the three Facebook pages – appraisal, publicity, job application, help and suggestions.

In the Hilton Hotels & Resorts page, publicity was the preferred type, followed by appraisal and then commenting to seek any kind of help. Job application was the reason with the lowest number of posts. For the Marriott Hotels & Resort fans, leaving a post giving an appraisal to the hotel chain is the favorite reason to positively comment on their page and job application appears in the last position in this distribution. As for the RIU Hotels and Resorts, the majority of positive posts are an appraisal to their brand and similarly to the other two hotel chains, looking for a job in their Facebook page is the reason with the lowest representation. Overall, appraisal is the most common type of post among positive fan posts; it may still be assessed that as the Facebook page with the highest number of fans, Hilton Hotel & Resorts is the page with the highest number of publicity posts.



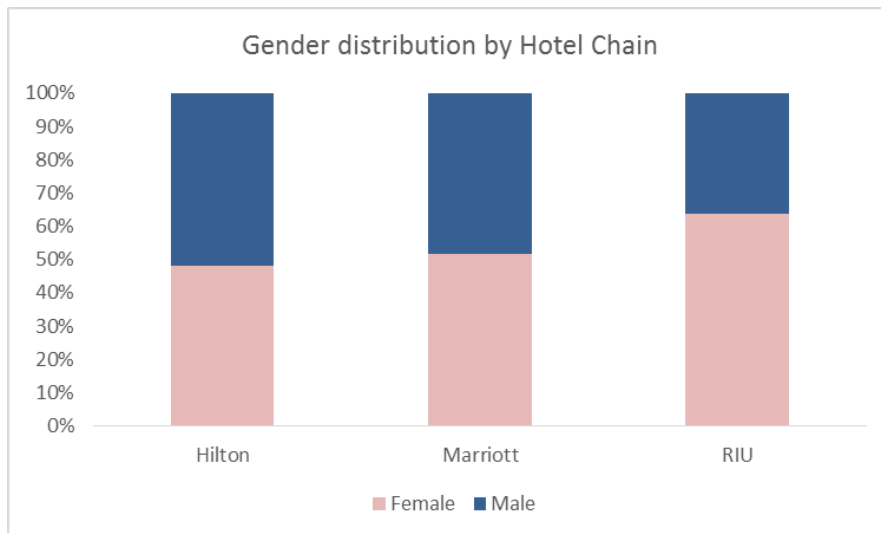
**Figure 6 - Types of Positive Fan Posts**

#### **d) Hotel Chain vs. Gender**

The below cross-tabulation table shows the distribution of complaints by gender for each of the three hotel chains. Overall, from the 1,049 complaints posted on the three Facebook pages, 540 (51.5%) were female and 509 (48.5%) male. Hilton Hotels & Resorts and Marriott Hotels & Resorts obtained very similar percentages but in opposite trends, as the first had more male complaints – almost 52%, while in the last most complaints were female (nearly 52%). In RIU Hotels and Resorts 63.6 % represents a majority of female complaints, thereby pointing out a greater percentage distribution between the two genders, as Figure 7 illustrates.

**Table 6 - Hotel Chain vs. Gender Cross-tabulation**

	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Hotel Chain Hilton	191 51.9%	177 48.1%	368 100%
Marriott	286 48.2%	307 51.8%	593 100%
RIU	32 36.4%	56 63.6%	88 100%
Total	509 48.5%	540 51.5%	1049 100%



**Figure 7 - Gender Distribution by Hotel Chain**

#### **e) Hotel Chain vs. Categories**

Although during data collection the complaints were accounted for and distributed into twelve categories, so that the statistical tests to be carried out later could be valid, it was necessary to aggregate the categories whose cells had a lower score. When creating the new categories, the areas they belonged to were also taken into account, i.e. categories of similar hospitality areas were aggregated. Thus, the new aggregate categories are:

**Table 7 - New Categories**

<b>New Categories</b>	<b>Former Categories</b>
<i>Food</i>	Restaurant, Bar, Room-Service, Breakfast
<i>Common Areas and Floors</i>	Floors, Common Areas
<i>Rooms</i>	Room, Toilet

Table 8 displays the distribution of complaints by category, also showing the division of these per each of the three hotel chains. Out of the total of 1,049 complaints, 39.2% were general complaints, 29.5% fell on the booking process, 12.5% were related to rooms and the remaining were divided by the other categories, noting that the common areas and floors category got just 1% of the complaints. Additionally, with a total of 56.5% Marriott Hotels & Resorts stood out with the highest number of complaints, followed by the Hilton Hotels & Resorts with 35.1% and the RIU Hotels and Resorts with 8.4%.

At Hilton Hotels & Resorts, booking accounted for 38% of the complaints, followed by general complaints with 33.2% and rooms with 13%, with the remaining categories having residual percentages.

In the Marriott Hotels & Resorts hotel chain, general complaints represented 41.7% of the complaints about their hotels, 26.1% concerning the booking process, 11.5% related to the conditions of the rooms, while the remaining percentages were divided into the other categories.

Regarding RIU Hotels and Resorts, general complaints with 47.7% were also the main complaints. The conditions of the rooms had 17% of the total complaints, followed by bookings with 15.9% and also the services related to food and beverages with 9.1%, while the remaining three categories had residual values.

**Table 8 - Categories vs. Hotel Chain Cross-tabulation**

		Hotel Chain			Total
		Hilton	Marriott	RIU	
Categories	Booking	140 38%	155 26.1%	14 15.9%	309 29.5%
	Front Desk	18 4.9%	57 9.6%	4 4.5%	79 7.5%
	Complimentary Services	17 4.6%	44 7.4%	4 4.5%	65 6.2%
	General Complaints	122 33.2%	247 41.7%	42 47.7%	411 39.2%
	Food	17 4.6%	18 3%	8 9.1%	43 4.1%
	Common Areas and Floors	6 1.6%	4 0.7%	1 1.1%	11 1.0%
	Rooms	48 13%	68 11.5%	15 17%	131 12.5%
	Total	368 100%	593 100%	88 100%	1049 100%
		35.1%	56.5%	8.4%	100%

#### **f) Hotel Chain vs. Hotel Response**

In the table below we can observe the behavior of the three hotel chains towards the posts written by users of their Facebook pages containing complaints, namely whether there was an answer from them.

Out of the total of collected complaints, 80.5% received a response from the involved hotel chains, opposing to 19.5% of the times when there was no feedback, at least in a public and visible way.

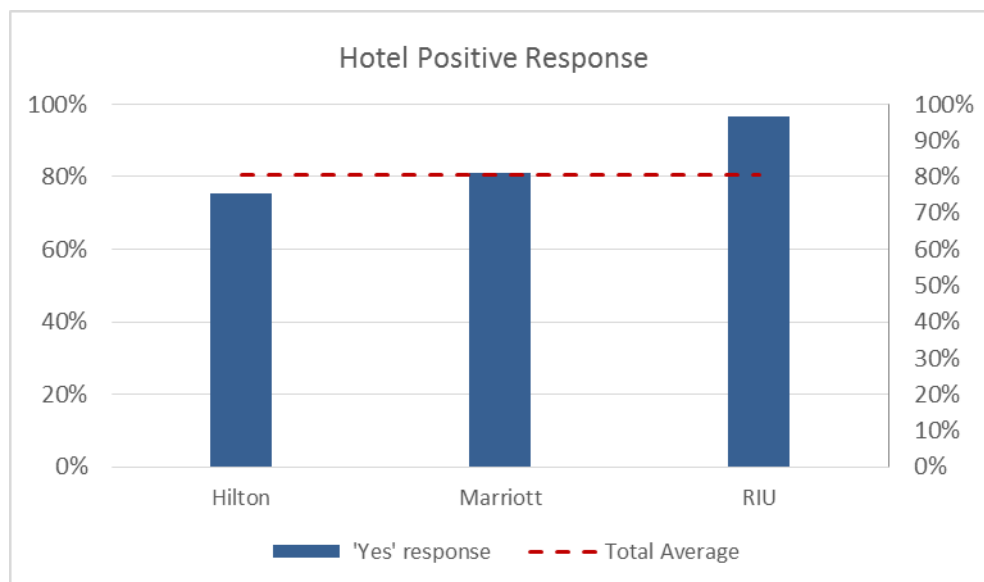
In relation to each of the three cases, in all of them the number of times in which there was a response was always higher than its absence – in RIU Hotels and Resorts the 'yes' response reached 96.6% while at Marriott Hotels & Resorts a total of 81.1% of complaints obtained a reply, and at Hilton Hotels & Resorts this could be seen in 75.5% of the cases.



**Table 9 - Hotel Chain vs. Hotel Response Cross-tabulation**

	Hotel Response		Total
	Yes	No	
Hotel Chain Hilton	278 75.5%	90 24.5%	368 100%
Marriott	481 81.1%	112 18.9%	593 100%
RIU	85 96.6%	3 3.4%	88 100%
Total	844 80.5%	205 19.5%	1049 100%

Figure 8 illustrates the hotel positive response percentage each hotel chain achieved compared with the sample total average. As it is possible to observe, Hilton Hotels & Resorts' positive response percentage was lower than the total average, with Marriott Hotels & Resorts' percentage standing very slightly above the total average, though. However, in RIU Hotels and Resorts the same percentage clearly exceeded the total average.



**Figure 8 - Hotels Positive Responses**

### **g) Hotel Chain vs. Response Time**

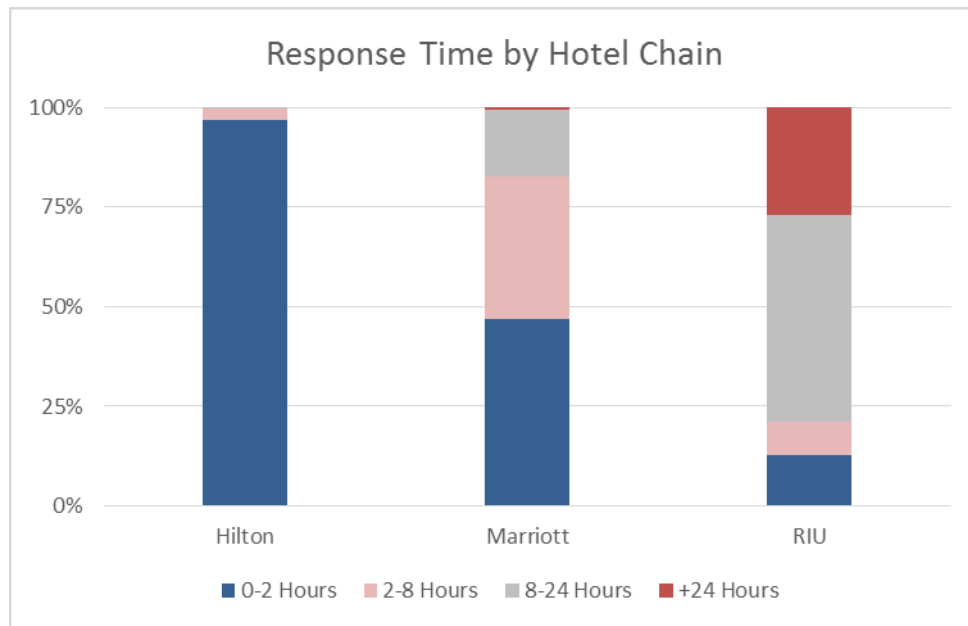
The cross-table below shows the distribution of time, in hours, that each of the three hotel chains took to respond to a complaint in their Facebook pages. Figure 9 complements the analysis of Table 10, presenting the response time of each hotel chain in a graphic way and of quick interpretation.

In the Hilton Hotels & Resorts all collected complaints were answered on the same day with the majority of complaints being answered within 0 to 2 hours (96.8%). In Marriott Hotels & Resorts there was a larger distribution in the response time with 46.8% of the complaints not taking more than 2 hours to be answered and 36% taking between 2 and 8 hours to do so. Regarding RIU Hotels and Resorts the trend was taking more than 8 hours to respond to a complaint, being the most common time period from 8 to 24 hours, corresponding to 51.8%.

Overall, 59.8% of all 844 complaints which got a reply from one of the hotel chains were answered up to two hours later, 22.3% took between 2 and 8 hours, 14.8% got a response between 8 and 24 hours after being posted and, finally, only 3.1% of complaints were answered after 24 hours.

**Table 10 - Hotel Chain vs. Response Time Cross-tabulation**

	Response Time				Total
	0-2 Hours	2-8 Hours	8-24 Hours	+24 Hours	
Hotel Chain Hilton	269 96.8%	8 2.9%	1 0.4%	0 0%	278 100%
Marriott	225 46.8%	173 36%	80 16.6%	3 0.6%	481 100%
RIU	11 12.9%	7 8.2%	44 51.8%	23 27.1%	85 100%
Total	505 59.8%	188 22.3%	125 14.8%	26 3.1%	844 100%



**Figure 9 - Response Time by Hotel Chain**

#### **h) Hotel Chain vs. Reaction to Response**

As shown in Table 11, the most frequent reaction by Facebook users upon receiving a response by one of the three hotel chains was a neutral one, with a total of 622 cases out of 844, corresponding to 73.7%. When observing each hotel chain, it can be seen that the neutral reaction comes also as the lead behavior by their users: in Marriott Hotels & Resorts this percentage reached 75.7%, followed by the Hilton Hotels & Resorts with 73.7% and the RIU Hotels and Resorts with 62.4%.

Additionally, out of the total number of responses to complaints, 15% had a reaction of positive nature, motivated by the results obtained in the Hilton and Marriott hotel chains, in which the positive reaction was also the second highest percentage (17.6% and 13.1%, respectively). On the other hand, albeit by a small margin, in the RIU Hotels and Resorts the reactions of negative nature (20%) were higher than the positive ones.

**Table 11 - Hotel Chain vs. Reaction to Response Cross-tabulation**

	Reaction to Response			Total
	Positive	Negative	Neutral	
Hotel Chain Hilton	49 17.6%	24 8.6%	205 73.7%	278 100%
Marriott	63 13.1%	54 11.2%	364 75.7%	481 100%
RIU	15 17.6%	17 20%	53 62.4%	85 100%
Total	127 15%	95 11.3%	622 73.7%	844 100%

**i) Categories vs. Gender**

This cross-tabulation combines the categories and the complainant's gender variables, displaying the distribution of different types of complaints according to gender.

Out of the total of female complainants, 41.5% were general complaints, 26.9% were about the booking process and 13.7% about the hotel rooms, with the remaining percentages divided among the other categories. As for male complainants, 36.7% made general complaints, 32.2% had issues with the booking process and 11.2% complained about the rooms (the remaining complaints were split among other categories). There is, therefore, a similar behavior between both genders.

It can also be noted that front desk, general complaints, food and rooms categories had more female complaints, contrary to booking, complimentary services and common areas and floors categories, in which male complaints were dominant.

**Table 12 - Categories vs. Gender Cross-tabulation**

		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
Categories	Booking	164	145	309
		53.1%	46.9%	100%
		32.2%	26.9%	29.5%
	Front Desk	32	47	79
		40.5%	59.5%	100%
		6.3%	8.7%	7.5%
	Complimentary Services	45	20	65
		69.2%	30.8%	100%
		8.8%	3.7%	6.2%
	General Complaints	187	224	411
		45.5%	54.5%	100%
		36.7%	41.5%	39.2%
	Food	18	25	43
		41.9%	58.1%	100%
		3.5%	4.6%	4.1%
	Common Areas and Floors	6	5	11
		54.5%	45.5%	100%
		1.2%	0.9%	1%
	Rooms	57	74	131
		43.5%	56.5%	100%
		11.2%	13.7%	12.5%
	Total	509	540	1049
		48.5%	51.5%	100%
		100%	100%	100%

For a significance level of 10%, chi-square test had a p-value = 0.003, meaning that the variables are statistically significant and the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) can be rejected. Therefore, there is a relationship between categories and gender variables.

**Table 13 - Categories vs. Gender Chi-Square Test**

	Value	df <sup>1</sup>	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) <sup>2</sup>
Pearson Qui-Square	19,500a	6	0.003
Likelihood Ratio	19,769	6	0.003
No. of Valid Cases	1 049		

When measuring this association, Cramer's V test shows a value of 0.136 which indicates a weak relationship. Thus, it is not possible to induce dependence between the two variables.

**Table 14 - Categories vs. Gender Cramer's V Test**

	Value	Approx. Sig. <sup>3</sup>
Nominal by Nominal Phi	0,136	0.003
Cramer's V	0,136	0.003
No. of Valid Cases	1 049	

#### **j) Categories vs. Hotel Response**

When analyzing the table that combines the existence of a response to a complaint according to each category, it is found that in all categories the cases when a response was obtained were always higher than the ones when no feedback was received, with percentages always higher than 75%.

In more detail, it can be seen that the front desk category was the one with a higher percentage difference, with 91.1% of the complaints obtaining a response from hotels.

**Table 15 - Categories vs. Hotel Response Cross-tabulation**

		Hotel Response		Total
		Yes	No	
Categories	Booking	252	57	309
		81.6%	18.4%	100%
		24%	5.4%	29.5%
	Front Desk	72	7	79
		91.1%	8.9%	100%
		6.9%	0.7%	7.5%
	Complimentary Services	53	12	65
		81.5%	18.5%	100%
		5.1%	1.1%	6.2%
	General Complaints	309	102	411
		75.2%	24.8%	100%
		29.5%	9.7%	39.2%
	Food	35	8	43
		81.4%	18.6%	100%
		3.3%	0.8%	4.1%
	Common Areas and Floors	9	2	11
		81.8%	18.2%	100%
		0.9%	0.2%	1%
	Rooms	114	17	131
		87%	13%	100%
		10.9%	1.6%	12.5%
	Total	844	205	1049
		80.5%	19.5%	100%
		80.5%	19.5%	100%

According to chi-square test (p-value = 0.01), with a significance level of 10%, the hypothesis that both categories and hotel response variables are independent can be rejected, meaning there is an association between the two.

**Table 16 - Categories vs. Gender Chi-Square Test**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Qui-Square	16,919a	6	0.010
Likelihood Ratio	18,009	6	0.006
No. of Valid Cases	1 049		

Cramer's V test value of 0.127 indicates a very weak relationship between both variables, reason why we cannot prove there is a dependency ratio linking the two.

**Table 17- Categories vs. Gender Cramer's V Test**

	Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal Phi	0,127	0.010
Cramer's V	0,127	0.010
No. of Valid Cases	1049	

#### **k) Categories vs. Response Time**

The analysis of the below cross-table reveals, as aforementioned, the 0-2 hours time interval as the most used by the three hotel chains to respond to complaints, corresponding to 59.8%. When looking at the time response distribution per category the scenario is similar, as taking 0 to 2 hours to respond a user's complaint is also the preferred response time associated to each complaint category. In particular, of the three categories with a higher number of complaints, booking complaints got a response in 0-2 hours in 61.9% of the cases, general complaints in 57.3% of the cases and rooms had an early response in 62.3% of the cases.

**Table 18 - Categories vs. Response Time Cross-tabulation**

		Response Time				Total
		0-2 Hours	2-8 Hours	8-24 Hours	+24 Hours	
Categories	Booking	156 61.9%	67 26.6%	27 10.7%	2 0.8%	252 100%
	Front Desk	43 59.7%	19 26.4%	9 12.5%	1 1.4%	72 100%
	Complimentary Services	32 60.4%	12 22.6%	9 17%	0 0%	53 100%
	General Complaints	177 57.3%	66 21.4%	52 16.8%	14 4.5%	309 100%
	Food	20 57.1%	5 14.3%	8 22.9%	2 5.7%	35 100%
	Common Areas and Floors	6 66.7%	2 22.2%	1 11.1%	0 0%	9 100%
	Rooms	71 62.3%	17 14.9%	19 16.7%	7 6.1%	114 100%
Total		505 59.8%	188 22.3%	125 14.8%	26 3.1%	844 100%



According to the chi-square table, the statistical test is not valid as two main validation rules are not met: 20% or fewer cells with an expected count less than 5 and also the minimum expected count would have to be equal or more than 1. Given this result, it was decided not to aggregate more categories, thus making this analysis of a possible dependency between the two variables as invalid.

**Table 19- Categories vs. Response Time Chi-Square Test**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Qui-Square	26,525a	18	0.088
Likelihood Ratio	29,635	18	0.041
No. of Valid Cases	844		

a. 7 cells (25%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 0,28.

### **1) Categories vs. Reaction to Response**

The following cross-tabulation intends to ascertain the possible existence of a relationship between categories and reaction to response variables.

Before seeing Table 20, by paying attention to chi-square test in Table 21, to a significant level of 10%, the p-value is 0.864. This result determines not rejecting the null hypothesis, showing, consequently, that there is no relationship between the two variables as they are independent.

Therefore, it is only possible to focus on the cross-tabulation overall data - neutral reaction is the predominant response with 73.7%, followed by the positive reaction with 15%, and finally the negative reaction with 11.3%.

**Table 20 - Categories vs. Reaction to Response Cross-tabulation**

		Reaction to Response			Total
		Positive	Negative	Neutral	
Categories	Booking	36	24	192	252
		14.3%	9.5%	76.2%	100%
		4.3%	2.8%	22.7%	29.8%
	Front Desk	13	10	49	72
		18.1%	13.8%	68.1%	100%
		1.5%	1.2%	5.8%	8.5%
	Complimentary Services	7	8	38	53
		13.2%	15.1%	71.7%	100%
		0.8%	0.9%	4.6%	6.3%
	General Complaints	43	36	230	309
		13.9%	11.7%	74.4%	100%
		5.1%	4.3%	27.3%	36.7%
	Food	8	3	24	35
		22.8%	8.6%	68.6%	100,0%
		0.9%	0.4%	2.8%	4.1%
	Common Areas and Floors	1	0	8	9
		11.1%	0%	88.9%	100%
		0.1%	0%	0.9%	1%
	Rooms	19	14	81	114
		16.7%	12.2%	71.1%	100%
		2.3%	1.7%	9.6%	13.6%
	Total	127	95	622	844
		15%	11.3%	73.7%	100%
		15%	11.3%	73.7%	100%

**Table 21 - Categories vs. Reaction to Response Chi-Square Test**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Qui-Square	6,907a	12	0.864
Likelihood Ratio	7,662	12	0.811
No. of Valid Cases	844		

### m) Response Time vs. Reaction to Response

In an attempt to examine whether there is a link between the variables response time and reaction to the response, the following cross-table presents the combination of data of the two.

Similarly to previous point l), the chi-square test result makes the Table 22 detailed analysis unfeasible. Through the chi-square test (p-value=0.104), with a significance level of 10%, both variables are not statistically significant. Thus, there is no relationship between the two as we do not reject the null hypothesis.

Unable to cross the data of the two categorical variables, the conclusion drawn from the interpretation of the table below is the same as the one previously stated: a higher frequency from neutral nature reactions overall translated into almost 74%, followed by the positive reaction with 15% and the negative reaction with 11.3%.

**Table 22 - Response Time vs. Reaction to Response Cross-tabulation**

		Reaction to Response			Total
		Positive	Negative	Neutral	
Response Time	0-2 Hours	83	52	370	505
		16.4%	10.3%	73.3%	100%
		9.8%	6.2%	43.8%	59.8%
	2-8 Hours	29	22	137	188
		15.4%	11.7%	72.9%	100%
		3.4%	2.6%	16.3%	22.3%
	8-24 Hours	12	14	99	125
		9.6%	11.2%	79.2%	100%
		1.4%	1.7%	11.7%	14.8%
	+24 Hours	3	7	16	26
		11.5%	27%	61.5%	100%
		0.4%	0.8%	1.9%	3.1%
Total		127	95	622	844
		15%	11.3%	73.7%	100%
		15%	11.3%	73.7%	100%

**Table 23 - Response Time vs. Reaction to Response Chi-Square Test**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Qui-Square	10,524a	6	0.104
Likelihood Ratio	9,313	6	0.157
No. of Valid Cases	844		

#### n) Gender vs. Reaction to Response

Finally, when combining the types of reaction to the hotel chains response to each of the complainants' genders, there is a similar behavior between the two. In both samples a neutral reaction towards the hotel response prevailed over commenting in a positive or negative way - in men the neutral reaction got a 71.3% preference whereas in women the same reaction got a 75.8% preference.

However, by resorting to the chi-square test, for a significance level of 10%, the p-value of 0.318 indicates that both variables are independent, as the null hypothesis is not rejected, i.e. there is no association of dependency among gender and reaction to response.

**Table 24 - Gender vs. Reaction to Response Cross-tabulation**

		Reaction to Response			Total
		Positive	Negative	Neutral	
Gender	Male	66	47	281	394
		16.8%	11.9%	71.3%	100%
		7.8%	5.6%	33.3%	46.7%
	Female	61	48	341	450
		13.5%	10.7%	75.8%	100%
		7.2%	5.7%	40.4%	53.3%
Total	127	95	622	844	
	15%	11.3%	73.7%	100%	
	15%	11.3%	73.7%	100%	

**Table 25 - Gender vs. Reaction to Response Chi-Square Test**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Qui-Square	2,290a	2	0.318
Likelihood Ratio	2,286	2	0.319
No. of Valid Cases	844		

## 2. Survey

Counting only the number of surveys sent from the paid messaging service, after the four months when the different surveys were available online, out of the total 277 only 18 obtained a response: nine responses from complainants to Hilton Hotels & Resorts, one answer about the Marriott Hotels & Resorts and eight responses from RIU Hotels and Resorts guests.

The survey response rate was 6.5%, which was a very low value for the purpose. The low response rate to surveys led to the no significant validity of these to the intended objectives, thus not justifying the existence of a deep statistical analysis.

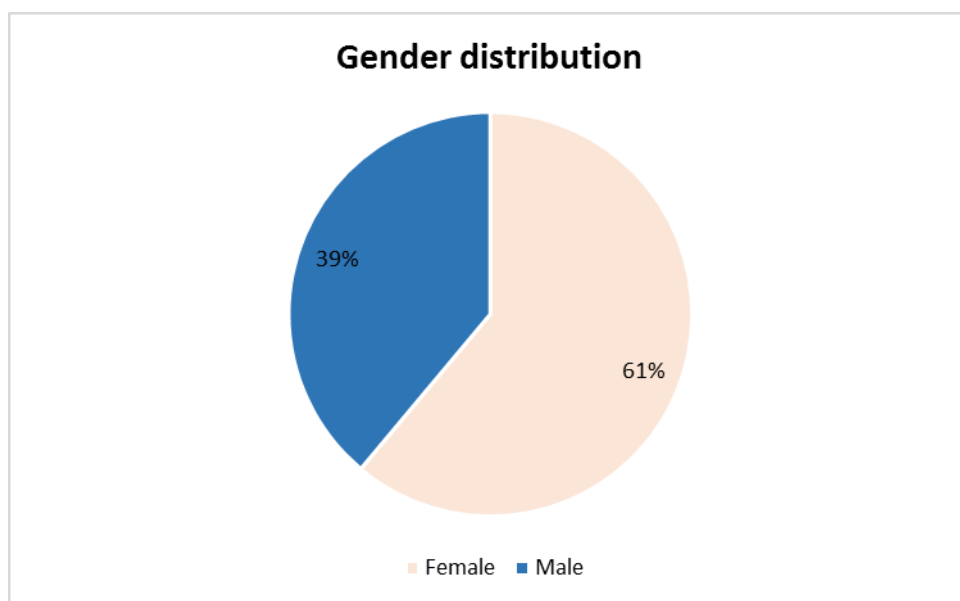
Despite aware that the statistical analysis of the data is neither valid nor conclusive, an overview of some results collected from the survey classification information questions, which allowed to make a sample characterization, is presented below.

### ▪ Gender

Table 26 shows the distribution of survey responses by gender and by hotel chain. The data shows a greater number of responses from female complainants face to male ones with a total of 11 surveys, thus representing 61% of the entire obtained sample, as shown in Figure 10.

**Table 26 - Gender Distribution**

	Female	Male
Hilton Hotels & Resorts	6	3
Marriott Hotels & Resorts	1	0
RIU Hotels and Resorts	4	4
TOTAL	11	7



**Figure 10 - Gender Distribution**

#### ▪ Age

The collection of the complainants' ages made it possible to build a table (see below) that shows the distribution by classes of the age of the complainants who responded to the surveys and its respective division by the three hotel chains in focus.

The [25-34 [class is the most representative age group in the whole sample with a total of 7 complainants. On the other hand, the age groups [35-44[, [65-74[ and [75-84[ represent the less expressive classes in the sample, with only one complainant older than 65 years of age.

It was also possible to calculate the average complainants' age: 40.61 years old.

**Table 27 - Age Groups**

	[13-24[	[25-34[	[35-44[	[45-54[	[55-64[	[65-74[	[75-84[
Hilton	1	5	1	-	2	-	-
Marriott	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
RIU	1	2	0	3	1	-	1
TOTAL	2	7	1	4	3	0	1

## ▪ **Nationality**

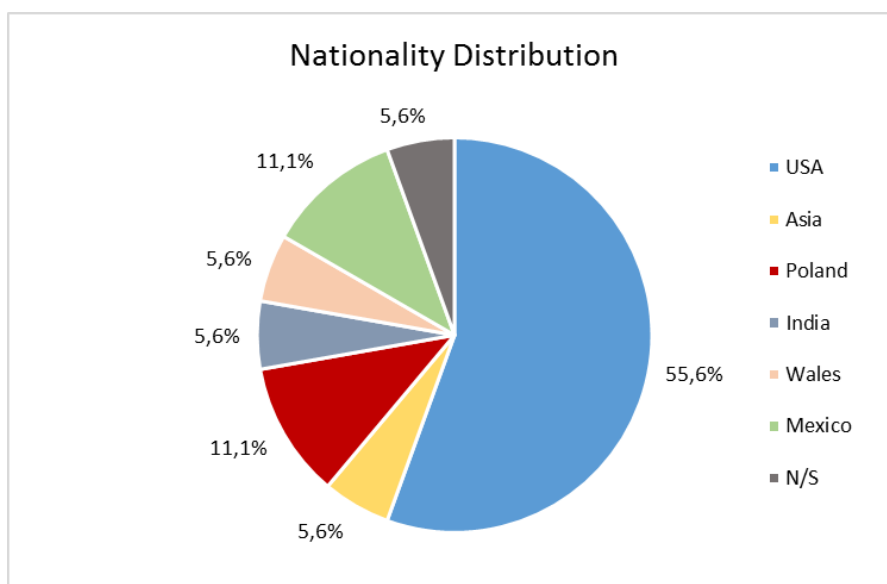
The nationality of the complainants who responded to the survey is presented in Table 28 and Figure 11.

The survey replies allowed to identify six different nationalities among complainants: American, Polish, Indian, Welsh, Mexican and Asian. One of the survey answers did not allow to identify the respective nationality as the complainant chose to write Caucasian instead of her country and so it is defined as N/S.

With 10 complainants out of the total 19 surveys, the USA is the most represented country, with nearly 56% of the sample. Both Poland and Mexico got two representatives and the remaining nationalities only got one complainant by country.

**Table 28 - Nationality Distribution**

	USA	Asia	Poland	India	Wales	Mexico	N/S
Hilton	5	1	2	1	-	-	-
Marriott	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
RIU	4	-	-	-	1	2	1
TOTAL	10	1	2	1	1	2	1



**Figure 11- Nationality Distribution**

## **V. CONCLUSION**

The present dissertation was set out to study the Facebook platform as a communication channel for complaints within the hospitality industry. By analyzing three major hospitality brands – Hilton Hotels & Resorts, Marriott Hotels & Resorts and RIU Hotels and Resorts – the key variables necessary to characterize the sample were identified, with emphasis on the complaints of hotel guests and the respective treatment by the hotel entities. The study also sought to acknowledge the satisfaction level of those hotel guests with the provided service recovery, seeking to know and analyze the actions taken by these organizations in a post-complaint process no longer visible through a Facebook page. The subjects under discussion intend thereby to answer the research questions raised in the Introduction:

- 1) How is the Facebook used by hotel guests in order to express their dissatisfaction with a service or product delivery?
- 2) How do organizations deal with the exposure of complaints through their Facebook pages?
- 3) What is the satisfaction level of hotel guests regarding the response given by the hotels management in relation to their complaint?

The main conclusions are presented in three parts:

- Findings and discussion
- Management implications
- Limitations and recommendations for future research



## **1. Findings and Discussion**

This section intends to provide a synthesis of the empirical results with respect to the research questions, presenting a link between the theoretical framework of this study and the data and information collected in the previous chapter.

Not responding directly to research questions, the first variables analyzed were essential to the sample identity knowledge, allowing to frame the different hotel chains within the Facebook context. Both the total number of fans and the number of people talking about variables showed a regular behavior, and there were no negative repercussions in terms of specific events and / or actions derived from the organizations themselves which may indicate that the length of these did not have a strong impact or that hotel chains acted positively in controlling such situations.

With regard to brand posts, it became clear that the three Facebook page managers had preference for publishing content on the form of photo posts. As for the most widely used form of interaction, to put “likes” in posts is the users’ preferred tool.

To address the first research question we took into account the fan posts variable and the variables that allowed the possible complaints characterization: gender and complaint categories.

The fan posts analysis showed a higher number of positive comments comparatively to the number of complaints posted by users on Facebook pages of the hospitality brands. Notwithstanding this positive data, the collected complaints demonstrated a homogenous gender distribution, with 51.5% being female and the remaining 48.5% male. These results, despite not showing a significant difference between genders, are in accordance with Keng *et al.* (1995) and R. C. Lewis (1983b) findings, with female users complaining more than male users. As for the types of complaints expressed by the users, the results reflect to a large extent the empirical findings of Mattila & Mount (2003) and Sparks & Browning (2010). General complaints, booking process and rooms were the three categories with the most complaints, respectively. The analysis of the categories according to gender distribution enabled to verify a relationship between both

variables. It was found that most female complained about front desk, food, rooms and general problems as opposed to male complainants, who preferred to express their dissatisfaction about the booking process, complimentary services and common areas and floors.

Thus, Facebook was used to express complaint on a service or product delivery, being the female hotel guests the most complainants. General dissatisfaction was, though, expressed by both genders and regarded mostly: general complaints, the booking process, and rooms.

When trying to understand how organizations deal with the amount of complaints in their Facebook pages, the time, the existence or non-existence of response by the hotel chains, and the reaction to response by the respective complainants were observed.

Overall, in 80.5% of the retrieved complaints the targeted hotel chain gave a response to the users' complaints while for the remaining 19.5% of complaints there was no sort of feedback. It is further noticed that in all organizations the percentage of complaint responses is greater than the lack of them. The high level of responsiveness from the hotel organizations to complainants refutes both Jean Harrison-Walker (2001) and Strauss & Hill (2001) findings. This disparity could be explained by the different characteristics that the social media sites analyzed have, and the importance and visibility Facebook has in the present days. An analysis to this variable also allowed to verify that although in all twelve categories the existence of response percentage was above 75%, there is no straight dependence between them, as one specific category does not influence obtaining a response from a hotel.

By considering the time between placing a complaint on the Facebook page and the feedback from the hotel, the data showed that in 59.8% of cases a reply comment was received in a period of up to 2 hours. Additionally, the findings indicate that almost 97% of the complaints received an answer on the same day (24-hour period). Unlike Mattila & Mount (2003) research, the majority of complaints when handled via Facebook received relatively fast responses, with almost 60% of complaints being immediately responded. This discrepancy of speed response can once again be associated in part with the differences between the two social media sites, without

underestimating all the work and attention of hotel chains regarding online complaint handling.

Concerning the consumers' reaction after response from organizations, we could observe that the neutral reactions were the most frequent ones. Although with lower percentages, the number of positive reactions surpassed the number of negative ones.

It also becomes important to mention that with regard to answering to customer complaints, RIU Hotels and Resorts was the one with the longest response time; however, nearly 97% of their complaints were answered - the highest percentage in this regard among the three organizations.

Based upon these findings, it can be concluded that hotels have been able to cope well with the complaints they receive on their Facebook pages, showing their concern to respond to the vast majority of complaints. In addition, they have also shown effort to provide some sort of feedback within a reasonable time after complaint.

The fact that the number of positive reactions by complainants towards the obtained hotel response exceed the negative reactions should be seen as further evidence of this care and attention given by organizations concerning less good comments.

Through the last research question, the study aimed to determine the satisfaction level of hotel guests with the post-complaint treatment given by hotel chains. The number of survey responses did not allow to obtain data subject to statistical analysis; hence, it is not possible to draw any conclusions on this research point.

## **2. Management Implications**

Based on the results and conclusions presented before, some advice and recommendations are suggested:

- Hotel chains should see social networks as a complement to their traditional outreach strategies, making an investment in these communication platforms not only as promotional tools but also as relationship building tools with their customers;
- As the biggest social network worldwide, Facebook should be a tool to be highly considered by hotel chains;
- Hotel chains should create and steer specific and appropriate strategies and marketing plans to their social networks, creating for that purpose social media teams to meet the customers' expectations and needs, aiming the users' positive feedback on their online platforms;
- Hotel chains should promote greater interaction among fans and between the fans and the brand, by diversifying and innovating the way to generate new content;
- Hotel chains should see the least used interaction tools by their users, namely the brand posts comments, as a way to revert and take advantage to obtain/achieve greater engagement for their Facebook pages. This is possible through the creation of incentives from organizations towards their users to comment on the generated content, such as add text on each post to encourage users to give their own opinion, thereby allowing them to obtain not only information about consumers themselves and topics of interest to the company but also to foster a greater interaction between user and organization, just like Withiam (2011) and HeBs (2011) suggested.
- The existence of social media teams allows for a complete control and availability to answer any and all types of shared content on hotel chain online sites, whenever necessary or relevant;

### **3. Limitations and Future Research**

This study had some limitations that, despite not compromising the investigation as a whole, did not allow to achieve greater beneficial results to the subject(s) under study. It is then expected that the identified limitations can be addressed in future studies.

Facebook privacy policy and messages sending service conditioned the sending of satisfaction surveys to hotel complainants and the consequent number of responses received for this purpose (low response-rate). An alternative to overcome this problem would be to extend the period in which the survey is active online, allowing to send the questionnaire to a greater number of complainants. On the other hand, seeking other social media platforms related to hotel chains under review, such as discussion forums, online communities, etc., where it is possible to administer free surveys or at a low-cost, would allow potential new customers and complainants to be included in the study sample.

The selected sample only allowed the study of characteristics and variables of the three hotel chains and related complainants. On the one hand, as there is already data collected in two homologous periods of time, it would be interesting to carry out a new data collection in another homologous period and compare and analyze behavioral patterns, both by hotel chains and their customers. On the other hand, widening the spectrum of the sample to other hospitality organizations, or even in tourist industry, would provide important new information.

For further investigations, adding new variables for analysis would also be an added value, namely: data collection from the hours and days of the week in which users publish content on Facebook pages and the hours brand posts are published.

Due to the analysis of the fan posts variable and after verifying that on the Facebook pages of hotel chains with more 'likes' there is a high number of advertising placed as posts, another relevant issue for analysis could be if this type of posts interfere with users when seeking information and whether, in excess, it is an obstacle to the hotel chains themselves when searching for comments that may be pertinent to the company.

For a larger complement regarding the importance and growth of social networks, we would suggest a parallel analysis of the social network platforms Facebook and Twitter of the targeted hotel chains.

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## **APPENDIX**

### **APPENDIX A – List of Categories**

**1 Booking**

- 11 Service
- 12 Incorrect
- 13 Difficulty in modifying
- 14 Difficult to cancel
- 15 Difficult to book
- 16 Refusal to upgrade
- 17 Lack of security in bank data

privacy

- 18 Overbooking
- 19 Wrong room type assignment
- 20 Difficulty in receiving refund
- 21 Charged incorrectly
- 22 High prices

**2 Front Desk**

- 21 Staff
- 22 Communication

**3 Restaurant**

- 31 Staff
- 32 Service
- 33 Quality
- 34 Room
- 35 Price

**4 Bar**

- 41 Staff
- 42 Service
- 43 Quality
- 44 Room
- 45 Closed for construction

**5 Room-Service**

- 51 Staff
- 52 Service
- 53 Quality
- 54 Menu

**6 Breakfast**

- 61 Staff
- 62 Room
- 63 Quality
- 64 Service time
- 65 High price

**7 Room**

- 71 Luminosity
- 72 Comfort
- 73 Equipments
- 74 Soundproofing
- 75 Cleanliness
- 76 Amplitude

77 Conservation state

78 Decor

**8 WC**

- 81 Luminosity
- 82 Equipments
- 83 Amenities
- 84 Cleanliness
- 85 Amplitude
- 86 Bad odors

**9 Floors**

- 91 Staff
- 92 Cleanliness

**10 Common Areas**

- 101 Accessibility
- 102 Cleanliness
- 103 Decor
- 104 Luminosity
- 105 Equipments
- 106 Conservation state
- 107 Disrespect for non-smoking

areas

**11 Complimentary Services**

- 111 Laundry
- 112 Maintenance
- 113 Health Club
- 114 SPA
- 115 Internet
- 116 Pool
- 117 Parking
- 118 Jacuzzi
- 119 Facilities for coffee

**12 General Complaints**

- 121 Hotel Image
- 122 Customer Service
- 123 Security
- 124 Service
- 125 Unavailable equipment
- 126 Closed hotel

## **APPENDIX B – Survey**

## Hotel - customer online interaction, Hilton Hotels & Resorts

Dear Sir/Madame

We are academics and we work independently of any private organization whatsoever. Our research interest is to understand customer-company online interaction. This scientific project uses completely anonymous data.

Since you posted a comment/complaint regarding some issues on the Hilton Hotels & Resorts Facebook page I would like to ask if you could please give us your opinion about some aspects related to that situation.

Thank you for helping with my Masters dissertation and please feel free to contact me for any further inquiries at [120499010@fep.up.pt](mailto:120499010@fep.up.pt)  
Mafalda Garmelas

\*Obrigatório

1. 1. Which is your overall satisfaction level with the Hilton Hotels & Resorts during your stay? \*

Marcar apenas uma oval.

- ☐ Very unsatisfied
- ☐ Somewhat unsatisfied
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Somewhat satisfied
- ☐ Very satisfied

2. 2. Which of the following categories of problems motivated you to post a comment or complaint? \*

Please rate each item from a 1-5 scale, 1 being "low motivation level" and 5 "high motivation level" to what drove you to post.

Marcar apenas uma oval por linha.

	1	2	3	4	5	Not at all
Booking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reception	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Restaurant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Bar	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Room-service	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Breakfasts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Room	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
WC/Toilet	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Floors	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Common areas	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Complementary services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
General complaints	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

3. 3. Please describe, briefly, the problem or situation which motivated you to complain. \*

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4. 4. How serious/critical was that problem or situation to you on a 1-5 scale? \*

Please mark your answer on a 1-5 scale, with 1 being "minor problem" and 5 "highly disturbing problem"

Marcar apenas uma oval por linha.

	1	2	3	4	5	Not at all
Booking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reception	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Restaurant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Bar	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Room-service	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Breakfasts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Room	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
WC/Toilet	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Floors	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Common areas	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Complementary services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
General complaints	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5. 5. How many times have you posted criticism/comments on service providers' companies' sites, regardless of the industry, in the last two years? \*

Marcar apenas uma oval por linha.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	> 10
2012	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2013	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

6. 6. In which industry have you posted your criticism/complaints: \*

You can choose more than one option

Marcar tudo o que for aplicável.

- ☐ Hospitality
- ☐ Retail
- ☐ Restaurant
- ☐ Airlines
- ☐ Games/video
- ☐ Government/Administration



7. 7. Concerning your experience with this specific hotel, did you receive a response from the hotel? \*

Marcar apenas uma oval.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No    *Passe para a pergunta 9.*

8. 8. To what extent was the response appropriate: \*

Marcar apenas uma oval.

- ☐ Not appropriate
- ☐ Matched my expectations
- ☐ Exceeded my expectations

9. 9. What did you really want from the hotel when you posted your complaint? \*

You can choose more than one option

Marcar tudo o que for aplicável.

- ☐ Just share my anger
- ☐ To allow others to avoid their service
- ☐ To reinforce/get back my money
- ☐ Just to help them improve their service
- ☐ Outra: \_\_\_\_\_

10. 10. Which of the following service recovery strategies did the hotel use? \*

You can choose more than one option

Marcar tudo o que for aplicável.

- ☐ Apologized
- ☐ Corrected problem and let me know about it
- ☐ Provided an explanation
- ☐ Immediate action
- ☐ Hotel took responsibility for the problem
- ☐ Followed up to see if I was satisfied with response to the problem
- ☐ Redirected the complaint
- ☐ Money compensation
- ☐ Free stay voucher
- ☐ Another voucher
- ☐ Did nothing
- ☐ Outra: \_\_\_\_\_

## 11. 11. In general, how do you classify the hotel service recovery strategy? \*

*Marcar apenas uma oval.*

- ☐ Not satisfactory
- ☐ Appropriate
- ☐ Satisfactory
- ☐ Do not know

## 12. 12. How likely are you to recommend the hotel to a friend? \*

Please mark your answer on a scale from 0 "no recommendation" to 10 "definitely recommend"

*Marcar apenas uma oval.*

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## 13. 13. How likely would you stay at this hotel again? \*

*Marcar apenas uma oval.*

- ☐ Definitely not
- ☐ Probably would not
- ☐ Probably would
- ☐ Definitely would
- ☐ Unsure

## 14. Gender \*

*Marcar apenas uma oval.*

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male

## 15. Age \*

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## 16. Nationality \*

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Com tecnologia




## **APPENDIX C – Facebook Private Messages Sent to Complainants (Survey Distribution)**

Print Screen – Private Message Sent to Complainants of Hilton Hotels & Resorts


**Steve Saxton**

+ Mensagem nova

A conversa começou em 24 de Abril de 2014

**Mafalda Gamelas**24-04-2014 5:29

Good evening,  
I am a student at School of Economics and Management,  
University of Porto, Portugal.  
As part of my Msc in Management thesis, I would like to ask for  
your cooperation in completing this survey concerning Hotels -  
customer online interaction, namely the Hilton Hotels & Resorts.  
It is an anonymous and quick fill survey.  
  
[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1gtTWTvoYDQjL3cUS9UkRdxjB6Xn9tjTsg6ULBDqjXx4/viewform?usp=send\\_form](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1gtTWTvoYDQjL3cUS9UkRdxjB6Xn9tjTsg6ULBDqjXx4/viewform?usp=send_form)  
  
Thank you for your participation.  
Best regards,  
Mafalda

**Hotel - customer online interaction, Hilton Hotels & Resorts**  
Dear Sir/Madame We are academics and we work independe...  
[docs.google.com](https://docs.google.com)

Print Screen – Private Message sent to Complainants of Marriott Hotels & Resorts

Laurie Cozart

+ Mensagem nova



Mafalda Gamelas

30-05-2014 23:43

Good night,

I am a student at School of Economics and Management,  
University of Porto, Portugal.

As part of my Msc in Management thesis, I would like to ask for  
your cooperation in completing this survey concerning Hotels -  
customer online interaction, namely the Marriott Hotels &  
Resorts.

It is an anonymous and quick fill survey.

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/14zZBCDCbDwviYP2yz5lUmdSq4AyS3mccDseqIB3HC-8/viewform?usp=send\\_form](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/14zZBCDCbDwviYP2yz5lUmdSq4AyS3mccDseqIB3HC-8/viewform?usp=send_form)

Thank you for your participation.

Best regards,

Mafalda



**Hotel - customer online interaction, Marriott Hotels & Resorts**

Dear Sir/Madame We are academics and we work independe...

[docs.google.com](https://docs.google.com)


✓ Vista às 31/5

Print Screen – Private Message sent to Complainants of RIU Hotels and Resorts

**Josh Gutowski**

+ Mensagem nova


11 de Junho de 2014

**Mafalda Gamelas**11-06-2014 3:21

Good night,  
I am a student at School of Economics and Management,  
University of Porto, Portugal.  
As part of my Msc in Management thesis, I would like to ask for  
your cooperation in completing this survey concerning Hotels -  
customer online interaction, namely the RIU Hotels and Resorts.  
It is an anonymous and quick fill survey.

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1MayiphwgWaBgl42F38cCxhmY1X6ckGP3ubRgE3hxnak/viewform?usp=send\\_form](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1MayiphwgWaBgl42F38cCxhmY1X6ckGP3ubRgE3hxnak/viewform?usp=send_form)

Thank you for your participation.  
Best regards,  
Mafalda

**Hotel - customer online interaction, RIU Hotels and Resorts**  
Dear Sir/Madame We are academics and we work independe...  
[docs.google.com](https://docs.google.com)

✓ Vista às 11/6


## **APPENDIX D – Examples of Customer Reactions**

### Example of a Negative Customer Reaction





## Example of a Positive Customer Reaction



**Marriott Hotels & Resorts**

19/7 · 🌐

Marriott,

I just received the worst customer service from your 800 customer service team. I made two reservations through your ADA 800 number on 4/11. One in Troy on in Traverse City (both in MI). I booked over the phone to make sure I had wheel chair accessible shower for my mother. Upon arrival to the second reservation at the Fairfield in Traverse we were informed this type of room was not available. This means the man I spoke with in April did not do what he gauranteed over the phone. After 1 hour and 35 minutes on the phone with your 800 number, discussing my disappointment three rude, unprofessional Marriott employees, the most horrific being Bobi Madsen, a compromise about my requested discount was not met. The Fairfield is not responsible for this error, your ADA department verbally confirmed a room and booked something else.

Besides the booking error, I suggest you look at these customer service reps as they are doing a disservice to your brand. Additionally, as a result of this abysmal interaction, I never plan to stay at Marriott brand hotel again.


Marriott, you should be ashamed of your customer service and their blatant disregard of customers with disabilities.

Tessa Bresnen

— em Fairfield Inn & Suites Traverse City.


Gosto · Comentar · Partilhar · 👍 3 💬 8

👍 3 pessoas gostam disto.



**Marriott Hotels & Resorts** Hi Tessa, we are truly sorry to hear this. Please send us a private message containing your confirmation number and contact information. We certainly want to address this. Regards, Sara

19/7 às 3:34 · Gosto · 👍 4



Thanks, I will send that tomorrow in a private message. Thanks for the response.

19/7 às 3:35 · Gosto

## Example of a Neutral Customer Reaction



20/4 · 🌐

RIU Hotels and Resorts

I want to make an official complaint.  
Blood on the floor in the room I stayed in.. Discussing and the hotel  
response was the juke is full  
Please provide details to complain

Gosto · Comentar · Partilhar · 👍 1 💬 1

 gosta disto.



Escreve um comentário...



**RIU Hotels and Resorts**  Dear Emma, please contact with our  
Customer Service team at [crm@riu.com](mailto:crm@riu.com) with more details about your stay  
so they can help you with your complaint.  
Gosto · Responder · 21/4 às 17:36